

The Educational Role of Teachers in Strengthening Students' Digital Ethics Character at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan Batu: A Contextual Study

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i2.2146>

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A B S T R A C T

The rapid advancement of digital technology has influenced students' behavior, particularly in their use of digital media in educational contexts. However, limited research has specifically examined how teachers actively shape and strengthen students' digital ethics in primary school settings. This study aims to explore the role of teachers in fostering students' digital ethics at MI Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan Batu, focusing on implementation strategies and challenges. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that teachers act as educators, mentors, and role models by instilling values, modeling appropriate behavior, building positive habits, and maintaining communication with parents. Key challenges include unequal digital literacy among students, exposure to inappropriate content, and the absence of comprehensive school policies. These findings imply the need for structured school policies and teacher capacity-building programs to strengthen digital ethics education effectively.

Keywords: *Teacher, Digital Ethics; Students' Character, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.*

Article History:

Received 02nd February 2026

Accepted 10th April 2026

Published 11th April 2026



INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed various aspects of life, including education. Students at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level are now part of a digital generation that is highly familiar with gadgets, the internet, and social media from an early age. While this condition offers broad opportunities for learning and access to information, it also raises serious concerns regarding students' digital ethics, such as inappropriate online communication, misuse of social media, and limited ability to evaluate information based on moral and religious values (Sari & Nugroho, 2022). Consequently, strengthening students' digital ethics character has become an urgent priority in basic education.

Recent international studies on digital citizenship emphasize the importance of integrating ethical awareness, critical thinking, and responsible technology use into early education (Ribble, 2015; Choi, 2016). Similarly, national studies highlight that digital ethics education in Indonesia remains insufficiently integrated into classroom practices and often lacks contextual application in students' daily digital experiences (Rahmawati, 2021; Hidayat & Wahyuni, 2023). In the context of Islamic education, teachers hold a strategic role not only as knowledge transmitters but also as moral agents who shape students' character through value-based guidance and exemplary behavior.

However, previous studies have not sufficiently explored how teachers in Islamic primary school settings actively implement strategies to strengthen students' digital ethics, particularly in connecting religious values with real digital practices. In addition, limited

attention has been given to the practical challenges teachers face in fostering ethical digital behavior among young learners.

At MI Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan Batu, similar issues are evident. Students' use of digital media is increasing, yet their understanding of ethical behavior remains limited. Instruction tends to emphasize normative content, with minimal integration of digital ethics into meaningful learning experiences. Furthermore, disparities in teachers' digital competencies and the lack of collaboration between schools and parents contribute to the suboptimal development of students' digital ethics. As an Islamic educational institution, MI Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan bears a significant responsibility in shaping students who are not only academically competent but also possess noble character in both real and digital life. Strengthening digital ethics character through the educational role of teachers is one of the important efforts to address the challenges of educational digitalization. Teachers are expected to be able to internalize Islamic values into students' digital behavior through meaningful and sustainable learning processes (Maulana, 2022).

Based on the above description, this study is important to be conducted in order to examine in depth the educational role of teachers in strengthening students' digital ethics character at MI Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan. This research is expected to provide a concrete portrayal of the strategies, roles, as well as supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of digital ethics education based on Islamic values, while also contributing to the development of Islamic educational practices in the digital era.

While previous research highlights the importance of digital ethics education, there remains a lack of empirical evidence on how teachers address practical challenges and bridge the gap between normative ethical instruction and students' actual behavior in digital environments.

METHOD

Respondents

This study employed purposive sampling to select participants who were directly involved in digital ethics education at MI Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan Batu. The selection criteria were based on participants' roles, experiences, and active engagement in students' digital learning processes. The respondents consisted of four groups: (1) teachers who have experience integrating digital ethics into classroom instruction, (2) the head of the madrasah who provides institutional leadership and policy perspectives, (3) students who actively use digital media in learning activities, and (4) parents who supervise and guide students' digital behavior at home. The inclusion of these participants enabled the researcher to capture diverse yet complementary perspectives, ensuring a holistic understanding of digital ethics practices across school and home environments.

Instruments

Data were collected using three qualitative instruments. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies related to digital ethics. Second, participatory observation was carried out during classroom activities to capture authentic teacher-student interactions and the integration of digital ethics in real-time learning contexts. Third, document analysis was conducted on relevant materials such as lesson plans, syllabi, teaching media, and school policies to provide contextual and institutional insights into digital ethics implementation.

Procedures

Data collection was conducted systematically in four stages. Initially, the researcher obtained formal permission from the school and secured informed consent from all participants. This was followed by classroom observations focusing on teaching practices and students' digital behavior. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, students, the school leader, and parents to gain deeper insights. Finally, relevant documents were collected and reviewed to support and triangulate the field data. This structured procedure ensured comprehensive, contextual, and ethically sound data collection.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis with an inductive approach. The process began with data familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents. This was followed by open coding to identify initial categories, axial coding to explore relationships among categories, and selective coding to synthesize overarching themes. The coding process was conducted systematically to ensure that emerging themes accurately reflected the data. This analytical approach enabled the identification of key patterns related to teachers' roles, strategies, and challenges in fostering digital ethics.

Trustworthiness

To enhance methodological rigor, this study applied several trustworthiness strategies. Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement in the field and triangulation of multiple data sources (interviews, observations, and documents). Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Dependability was maintained through consistent and transparent coding procedures, while confirmability was supported by grounding interpretations in empirical data. These measures ensured that the findings are reliable, valid, and reflective of participants' actual experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**The Teachers Occupy a Highly Central Position as Educators, Mentors, and Primary Role Models in Students' Digital Activities.**

The findings of this study on the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in shaping students' digital ethics character at MI Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan indicate that teachers hold a highly central position as educators, mentors, and primary role models in students' digital activities. Amid the rapid development of digital technology, PAI teachers are not only required to deliver religious instruction through conventional approaches, but also to contextualize Islamic values within the framework of digital-based learning. This integration aims to enable students to act wisely, responsibly, and ethically in utilizing digital technological devices and media (Pranoto & Haryanto, 2024).

Teachers at MI Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan have made significant efforts to integrate Islamic teachings with the use of digital technologies. For example, during lessons, teachers explicitly highlight the importance of adab (etiquette) in online interactions, stressing the Islamic principles of honesty, respect, and kindness. In one observed lesson, the teacher discussed the concept of "*ghibah*" (backbiting) and "hoax" in the context of social media, teaching students the ethical implications of spreading false information or engaging in harmful online behavior.

Teachers have also developed a curriculum that aligns digital ethics with Islamic teachings. The curriculum includes lessons on the responsible use of digital media and encourages students to use technology for positive purposes, such as engaging in online learning platforms, participating in educational discussions, and conducting research. Teachers encourage students to use digital devices as tools for knowledge enhancement while also reminding them of the responsibility to use these tools in alignment with Islamic principles of morality.

Furthermore, the formation of students' digital ethics character occurs through interconnected processes involving the understanding of religious teachings, intensive guidance and exemplary conduct provided by teachers, family involvement, and support from a school environment that is adaptive to technological change. The synergy among these elements plays a crucial role in internalizing ethical values, ensuring that students' digital behavior reflects the moral principles taught in Islamic education (Rahimi et al., 2024).

The Teachers Serve as Moral Guides.

The teachers perform various strategic roles that contribute to the formation of students' digital ethics character, both directly and indirectly. At the fundamental level, teachers act as moral guides by introducing principles of digital ethics grounded in Islamic values, such as honesty (*sidq*), responsibility (*mas'uliyah*), self-protection from harmful actions (*hifz al-nafs*), and politeness in communication (*adab al-kalām*). These values serve as the primary foundation guiding students' behavior when interacting in digital spaces, including the use of the internet, social media, digital devices, and online learning platforms (Alfiyansyah et al., 2025).

In practice, the moral guidance provided by teachers is implemented through contextual learning strategies that relate Islamic ethical teachings to students' everyday digital experiences. Teachers actively discuss real-life digital cases, such as responsible social media use, respectful online communication, and critical evaluation of digital content, to help students internalize ethical values in meaningful ways. This contextual approach enables students to understand that Islamic moral principles are not abstract concepts but practical guidelines that regulate behavior in both offline and online environments. Consequently, students develop greater awareness of the ethical implications of their digital actions and interactions.

The teachers themselves act as role models for students in terms of ethical behavior in digital spaces. For instance, one teacher demonstrated how to conduct respectful online discussions in a school forum, showing students how to engage in debates without resorting to insults or offensive language. This modeling helps reinforce the idea that ethical behavior is not confined to face-to-face interactions but must extend to online behavior as well.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of teachers as moral guides is strengthened through consistent reinforcement and habituation of ethical behavior. Teachers encourage students to practice digital ethics continuously by modeling appropriate conduct, providing constructive feedback, and integrating ethical reflection into classroom discussions. This process helps students gradually develop self-control and moral responsibility when engaging with digital technologies. Previous studies indicate that sustained moral guidance and exemplary behavior from teachers significantly influence students' internalization of digital ethics, particularly when aligned with religious values and supported by a positive school culture (Alfiyansyah et al., 2025).

The Teachers Have Made Efforts to Integrate Digital Ethics Values into Various Learning Activities

The teachers have made consistent efforts to integrate digital ethics values into various learning activities, although the implementation remains contextual and has not yet been systematically incorporated into formal lesson plans (RPP). When students display inappropriate digital behavior such as imitating non-educational content, using impolite language in class WhatsApp groups, playing with gadgets during lessons, or sharing information without verification the teachers utilize these situations as moments for moral education. Teachers relate such behaviors to Islamic teachings, enabling students to understand that digital ethics constitutes an integral part of practicing Islamic values in everyday life. This approach helps students recognize that ethical conduct in digital spaces reflects religious responsibility and moral accountability (Maulana, 2023; Hidayat & Wahyuni, 2023).

The teachers at MI Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan consistently integrate digital ethics into their lessons, even though these efforts have not yet been formalized into a structured curriculum. For example, when students use inappropriate language in online interactions, such as in class WhatsApp groups, the teachers take this opportunity to explain the importance of *adab* (etiquette) in communication, both online and offline. They remind students of the Islamic principle that one's speech should always be kind, respectful, and free from vulgarity or insults. Teachers emphasize that every word, whether spoken or typed, holds significance and should reflect Islamic values of respect and gentleness, citing the Prophet Muhammad's advice to "speak good or remain silent."

Similarly, when students spend excessive time on gadgets during lessons, teachers address this issue by connecting it to the Islamic value of balance in life. The teachers explain that Islam encourages its followers to maintain a balance between work, rest, and leisure, and that this balance extends to digital device usage. They teach students that while technology can be a valuable tool for learning, it is important to avoid overindulgence and to use technology responsibly. This lesson helps students understand that Islam promotes moderation in all aspects of life, including the use of digital media.

In another instance, when students share inappropriate or offensive content on social media, teachers use this as a moment to discuss modesty (*haya*) in the digital world. Teachers explain that, just as Islam encourages modesty in dress and behavior in public spaces, it is equally important to maintain modesty in the digital world by being mindful of the images, videos, and messages shared online. Teachers remind students that their online presence should reflect their values as Muslims, ensuring that what they post does not contradict the Islamic teachings of modesty, integrity, and respect for others.

PAI Teachers Serve as Role Models and Apply Dialogical Communication

In responding to unethical digital behavior, the teachers tend to prioritize persuasive advice rather than punitive measures. This approach is considered appropriate for elementary-level students, who still require positive authority figures as role models. Teachers strive to demonstrate polite and respectful behavior in digital communication, both through online messaging and face-to-face interactions, allowing students to emulate such conduct. Teacher role modeling has proven to be a strong factor in shaping students' digital habits, particularly in terms of language politeness, openness in communication, and willingness to seek guidance when facing challenges in digital environments (Nurmala et al., 2026).

In addition to role modeling, the implementation of project-based thematic learning contributes significantly to the development of students' digital ethics character. Based on interviews with the teachers, assignments such as creating short memorization videos, producing creative da'wah content, and designing digital posters on noble character are used as means of habituating ethical digital practices. Through these activities, students not only learn religious content but also develop digital skills accompanied by an understanding of media norms and regulations. Each digital task is accompanied by clear guidelines regarding ethical image usage, respect for intellectual property, and the obligation to produce polite and educational content. Thus, the teachers not only enhance students' technological competencies but also cultivate awareness of proper conduct (*adab*) in digital media use (Sari & Nugroho, 2023).

The role of the teachers in shaping students' digital ethics cannot be separated from collaboration with parents. The high intensity of gadget use in the home environment makes school-based supervision alone insufficient. Therefore, the teachers utilize communication media such as WhatsApp groups to provide guidance and education to parents regarding the importance of accompanying and supervising children's digital activities. This communication pattern strengthens synergy between the school and families and creates value alignment in monitoring students' digital behavior. Parents reported that consistent guidance from teachers helps them guide their children more effectively, as the digital moral values conveyed at school are aligned with habituation practices at home (Rahmawati, 2022; Nurmala et al., 2026).

The findings indicate that students' digital behavior at MI Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan has shown positive changes following continuous habituation and educational efforts carried out by the teachers. Students have demonstrated improvements in polite communication on school digital platforms, increased selectivity in responding to information, and a growing awareness of digital footprints, leading them to be more cautious when sharing content. The teachers emphasized that these changes did not occur instantly but resulted from sustained, consistent, and repetitive character-building processes embedded in daily learning activities.

Nevertheless, this study also identifies several challenges faced by the teachers in shaping students' digital ethics. The first challenge relates to uneven levels of students' digital

readiness. Some students are already accustomed to using digital devices and social media, while others are still at an early stage of technological familiarity. This disparity requires teachers to adjust instructional strategies so that digital ethics education can be delivered proportionally and inclusively without creating gaps in understanding.

Another challenge arises from the overwhelming flow of digital information that is difficult to control. The teachers observed that students are frequently exposed to content that is inappropriate for their age and educational values, such as impolite language or the imitation of uneducational digital trends. This condition often hinders character education efforts at school, as the digital environment outside the school is not fully filtered. Consequently, teachers are required to be more creative and adaptive to ensure that character education remains relevant amid strong external digital influences.

Additionally, limited school policies pose a further challenge. The school has not yet established written guidelines explicitly regulating digital ethics, gadget use, and standards of students' digital behavior. As a result, the integration of digital ethics into learning activities largely depends on the initiative and creativity of the teachers. In fact, clear school policies would support more consistent, directed, and measurable digital character education.

Further discussion reveals that the role of the teachers in shaping students' digital ethics does not merely focus on technical aspects of technology use but emphasizes the internalization of Islamic moral values. Teachers instill the understanding that all human activities, including those in digital spaces, are under the supervision of Allah SWT. This spiritual awareness serves as a strong moral foundation that encourages students to regulate their digital behavior not merely due to rules, but out of faith-based motivation and personal responsibility.

On the other hand, technology also offers positive opportunities to support the role of the teachers. The use of digital media such as Islamic videos, educational content, and project-based assignments enables learning to become more contextual and engaging for students. Through guided digital experiences, students not only understand digital ethics conceptually but also practice them directly within learning activities. This approach contributes to the holistic and sustainable development of students' digital character.

Overall, the findings affirm that the teachers play a strategic role in shaping students' digital ethics at MI Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan. This role is manifested through role modeling, habituation of Islamic values, persuasive communication, digital learning management, and collaboration with parents and the school environment. Despite facing various challenges, the teachers continue to strive to instill moral and spiritual values so that students develop strong ethical awareness in navigating life in the digital era.

This study emphasizes that the role of the teachers is not only relevant within the context of conventional classroom learning but also highly urgent in guiding students to navigate the dynamics of the digital world. The rapid advancement of technology must be balanced with the strengthening of character education so that students not only possess digital competencies but are also grounded in noble moral values. In this way, students' digital activities can be directed toward responsible, ethical behavior that aligns with the principles of Islamic teachings.

Based on the analysis of interview, observation, and documentation data collected at MI Irsyadul Islamiyah Bagan, the educational role of the teachers in strengthening students' digital ethics character reveals several key findings relevant to the research questions. First, the teachers actively guide students in understanding and applying digital ethics grounded in Islamic values. This is evident in teachers' efforts to explain moral principles such as honesty, proper online communication, and responsibility in the use of technology, which is consistent with studies indicating that education based on Islamic teachings is effective in shaping students' digital ethics (Zakaria, 2024; Pranoto & Haryanto, 2024).

Second, the strategies employed by the teachers include integrating digital ethics content with habituation activities rooted in Islamic values. For example, teachers incorporate discussions on the positive use of social media into the lessons and apply the model of moral

exemplarity (*uswah hasanah*) in their digital communication with students. This approach aligns with research suggesting that the teachers can function as moral role models as well as guides for digital ethics through contextualized instructional practices (Alfiyansyah et al., 2025).

Third, the data indicate the presence of several obstacles in implementing digital ethics character strengthening. One major challenge is the limited digital literacy competence of teachers, particularly in designing learning activities that optimally integrate technology. This finding reflects previous studies highlighting the need to enhance teachers' technological literacy and digital ethics awareness to ensure that learning remains relevant in the digital era (Rahimi et al., 2024). Another challenge is the inconsistency of parental supervision over students' gadget use at home, which results in the ethical messages conveyed at school not being fully internalized in students' daily lives outside the madrasah.

Furthermore, observational data demonstrate that the integration of digital ethics habituation activities within the informal curriculum has contributed to positive changes in students' behavior. Students who previously accessed inappropriate content have shown increased awareness in selecting digital content, filtering information, and interacting politely in class groups or online learning communities. This finding supports studies emphasizing the importance of Islamic value-based education in fostering ethical digital citizenship (Pranoto & Haryanto, 2024).

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the central role of teachers as key agents in shaping students' digital ethics, particularly within the context of Islamic primary education. The positioning of teachers as educators, mentors, and role models aligns with existing literature on digital citizenship, which emphasizes that ethical digital behavior is most effectively developed through guided socialization and value-based instruction rather than through technical knowledge alone. In this study, teachers not only transmitted knowledge but actively contextualized Islamic values such as adab, honesty, and responsibility within students' everyday digital experiences. This supports previous research highlighting that moral integration in digital learning enhances students' ethical awareness and behavioral outcomes.

Furthermore, the study extends prior findings by demonstrating that moral guidance becomes more effective when delivered through contextual and experiential learning strategies. Teachers' use of real-life digital cases—such as addressing hoaxes, inappropriate language, and social media behavior—reflects a shift from abstract moral instruction to applied ethics. This finding is consistent with studies on character education, which argue that values are more likely to be internalized when learners can relate them directly to their lived experiences. In this sense, digital spaces are not merely tools for learning but also critical arenas for ethical practice.

Another important contribution of this study lies in highlighting the role of habituation and role modeling. The teachers' consistent demonstration of respectful communication and responsible digital behavior serves as a powerful mechanism for shaping students' attitudes. This finding confirms social learning theory, which posits that students learn behaviors through observation and imitation of authority figures. The preference for persuasive and dialogical approaches over punitive measures further strengthens this process, particularly at the primary education level where emotional and moral development is still formative.

In addition, the integration of digital ethics into project-based learning activities—such as creating digital content and participating in online discussions—demonstrates the potential of experiential learning in fostering both technical competence and ethical awareness. This approach supports the growing body of research advocating for the integration of digital literacy and character education, where students not only learn how to use technology but also understand the ethical implications of their actions. The use of guided digital tasks also indicates that structured learning environments can mitigate the risks associated with uncontrolled digital exposure.

However, this study also reveals several critical challenges that complicate the implementation of digital ethics education. The disparity in students' digital readiness suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient, requiring differentiated instructional strategies. Additionally, the pervasive influence of external digital environments, which often expose students to inappropriate content, highlights the limitations of school-based interventions alone. This finding underscores the importance of collaborative efforts between schools and families, as supported by previous studies emphasizing parental involvement in digital character education.

The absence of comprehensive school policies on digital ethics further indicates a structural gap that may hinder consistent implementation. While teachers demonstrate initiative and creativity, the lack of formal guidelines results in variability in practice and limits the scalability of successful strategies. This suggests that institutional support is essential to sustain and standardize digital ethics education.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by bridging the gap between normative discussions of digital ethics and practical classroom implementation. It highlights that effective digital ethics education requires a holistic approach that combines value integration, contextual learning, role modeling, and collaborative support systems. In the context of Islamic education, the incorporation of spiritual awareness adds a distinctive dimension, where ethical behavior is not only socially regulated but also internally motivated by faith. This integrated approach offers a meaningful framework for developing students' digital character in an increasingly complex technological landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that strengthening students' digital ethics requires more than integrating technology into learning; it demands intentional value-based guidance that connects ethical principles with students' real digital experiences. In the context of Islamic education, teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring that digital competence is accompanied by moral responsibility, where values such as *adab*, honesty, and accountability guide students' behavior in digital spaces. Practically, these findings imply that schools need to develop clear and structured policies on digital ethics to support consistent implementation across learning activities. Teachers should be equipped with continuous professional development programs focusing on digital pedagogy and ethical integration, enabling them to design contextual and meaningful learning experiences. At the policy level, there is a need for curriculum frameworks that explicitly incorporate digital ethics education, particularly within value-based subjects such as Islamic Religious Education, as well as stronger collaboration models between schools and parents to monitor students' digital behavior holistically. For future research, further studies are recommended to explore the effectiveness of specific instructional models for digital ethics education, including experimental or mixed-method approaches. Comparative studies across different educational levels or cultural contexts would also provide broader insights into how digital ethics can be fostered more effectively. Additionally, investigating the long-term impact of digital ethics education on students' behavior in real-world digital environments would contribute to the development of more sustainable and evidence-based educational practices.

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