



Parental Role in Instilling Moral Values in Early Childhood During the Digital Era: A Case Study of a Muslim Family

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of parents in instilling moral values in early childhood in the digital age. The phenomenon of increasing exposure to digital content that has the potential to disrupt children's character development is the main background of this study. Children tend to imitate behavior from digital media, while some parents, despite being highly educated, do not provide direct moral guidance due to their busy schedules or the assumption that moral education will be obtained from school and the environment. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, involving observation, interviews, and documentation as data collection techniques. The analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study show that active parental involvement has a significant effect on three main aspects of children's moral development: psychological condition, temperament, and empathy. Children who receive attention and moral guidance from their parents tend to have better self-confidence, are able to control their emotions, and show concern for others. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of the role of parents as primary educators in shaping children's character amid the challenges of the digital age, as well as the need to increase parents' awareness and capacity to carry out this function consistently.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of parents in shaping the character of young children is a fundamental aspect of moral education that cannot be replaced by any institution. Children first learn life values through interaction with their parents, who serve as the primary educators in the family (Adrian & Syaifuddin, 2017; Jannah & Umam, 2021; Mahmudin & Muhid, 2020; Rizky & Moulita, 2017). In early childhood, children are in a critical phase of psychological and social development, so proper parenting is crucial in determining the direction of a child's moral and personality development. In the digital age, the challenges of raising children have become increasingly complex. The development of information technology has changed the patterns of communication and interaction within families (Agustina, 2024; Kamila et al., 2025; Saman & Hidayati, 2023).

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Children now spend more time with digital devices such as gadgets, television, and the internet, which present a variety of unlimited content. Most of this content is not always in line with local moral and cultural values, thus potentially influencing children's behavior and way of thinking negatively.

This phenomenon raises concerns about moral degradation in early childhood. Children who are exposed to digital media too often without supervision tend to exhibit deviant behavior such as rudeness, dishonesty, and lack of empathy towards others (Syafitria et al., 2025). In many cases, children imitate behaviors they see on social media or in digital games, which often conflict with prevailing religious and social norms. Ironically, some parents with higher education backgrounds tend to provide less direct moral guidance to their children. Busy work schedules, social pressures, and the assumption that moral education will be obtained from school or the environment are the main reasons for this. In fact, effective character education must begin at home, through role modeling, open communication, and consistent supervision of children's activities (Ansori et al., 2024; Devianti et al., 2020; Khair, 2025; Oktavia et al., 2023; Sabrina et al., 2022).

This condition is evident in Taratak Village, Sutera Subdistrict, South Pesisir Regency, where there are cases of highly educated families who are not sufficiently involved in their children's character building. Children in these families exhibit rude behavior, lack of respect for their parents, and use inappropriate language. This indicates that the influence of digital media has reached remote villages, and the role of parents has become increasingly important in counterbalancing this impact.

The urgency of this study lies in the need for a deeper understanding of how parents can play a strategic role in protecting children from the negative influences of the digital age. The instilling of moral values cannot be delayed or left entirely to others. Parents must be at the forefront in shaping their children's character through exemplary behavior, open communication, and wise supervision of technology use. Conceptually, this study reinforces moral education theories that place the family as the first and foremost institution in shaping a child's personality. Moral development theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction within the family as a means of internalizing values. In this context, the role of parents as moral models becomes vital, especially when children are in the phase of imitation and identity formation (Abdullah, 2018; Irawan & Haris, 2022; Nurmadiyah, 2016; Wulandari & Fauzi, 2021).

The contribution of this study to the development of educational science, particularly Islamic education and parenting, lies in its efforts to integrate moral values with parenting approaches that are relevant to the challenges of the times. This study also provides a new perspective on the importance of digital literacy for parents so that they are able to effectively accompany their children in facing the rapid flow of information. By strengthening the role of parents in moral education, it is hoped that future generations will grow up to be individuals with noble character, resilience, and the ability to face the challenges of the times with strong values. Family-based moral education is key to building a civilized society with a strong personality amid the currents of globalization and digitalization. Therefore, this study is not only relevant locally, but also has broad implications in the context of family education in the modern era. Research on the role of parents in the digital age needs to be further developed in order to respond to ongoing social and technological changes. Thus, early childhood moral education can remain a priority in building the character of a nation that is ethical and competitive in the future.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in depth the phenomenon of the role of parents in instilling moral values in early childhood in the digital age,

particularly in the local context of Kampung Taratak, Sutura District, Pesisir Selatan Regency, Indonesia. Case studies provide space to understand the social, cultural, and psychological dynamics that influence parenting practices in families holistically. The research focuses on families that represent the phenomenon being studied, who have a higher education background but face challenges in instilling moral values in their children (Engkizar et al., 2023, 2025; Rianti et al., 2025; Zainal et al., 2022).

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with parents as the main informants, as well as direct observation of interactions between parents and children in their daily lives. Secondary data was obtained from neighbors, village heads, and supporting documents such as family profiles and records of children's activities. Informants were selected purposively based on their relevance and direct involvement in parenting practices. The researcher also conducted participatory observation to capture behaviors and communication patterns that were not revealed in the interviews.

The research instruments used were semi-structured interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation forms. The interview guidelines were designed to explore parents' perceptions, experiences, and strategies in instilling moral values in their children. Observations were conducted to record children's verbal and non-verbal expressions and parents' responses in specific situations. Documentation was used to supplement field data. All data were collected systematically and stored in the form of narratives and field notes.

Data analysis techniques were carried out in four stages: data reduction, data presentation, verification, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by sorting relevant information from interviews, observations, and documentation. Data presentation was carried out in a descriptive narrative form to describe parenting patterns and their impact on children's moral development. Verification is carried out by triangulating sources and techniques to ensure the validity of the findings. Conclusions are drawn based on thematic patterns that emerge from the data, which are then interpreted within the framework of early childhood moral development theory. The narrative of this method can be described in the form of a research flow: case identification → data collection → thematic analysis → interpretation → conclusion (Abduldayev & Mokhtar, 2024; Almardiyah et al., 2025; Aspanizam & Ahmed, 2024; Kasheem et al., 2025).

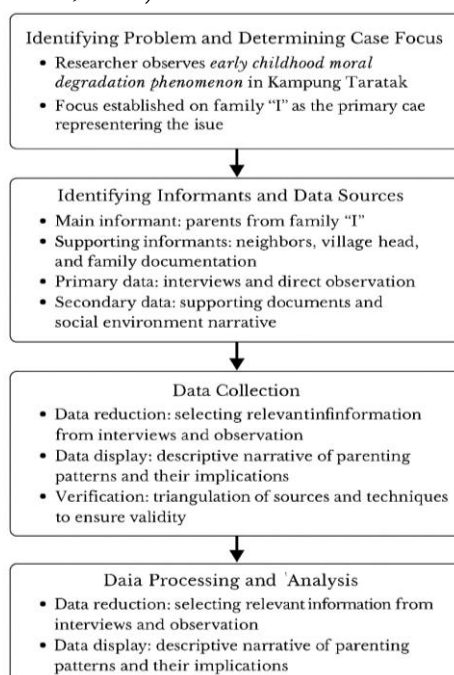


Fig 1. Research methodology stages

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the role of parents in instilling moral values in early childhood in the digital age, with a case study of families in Sutera District, South Pesisir Regency, Indonesia. The results show that active parental involvement has a significant influence on character building in children, especially in terms of psychological aspects, temperament, and empathy. These findings reinforce the assumption that the family is the first and foremost institution in children's moral education.

In terms of psychological conditions, children who receive attention and guidance from their parents show feelings of security, confidence, and emotional stability. Parents who are emotionally and physically present in their children's lives are able to create an environment that supports their mental development. Conversely, children who receive less attention tend to exhibit restless behavior, irritability, and lack of confidence. This is in line with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which states that young children need a sense of trust and security from their immediate environment.

In terms of temperament, consistent and loving parenting helps children manage their emotions and develop self-control. Children who are guided with a positive approach tend to be more patient, less prone to anger, and able to resolve conflicts constructively. These findings support Thomas and Chess's 1977 view that a child's temperament can be influenced by parental responses to the child's behavior from an early age (Asari & Satriana, 2024; Juwandy & Kusumastuti, 2023).

Empathy is also an important indicator in the formation of moral values. Children who are taught to understand the feelings of others and trained to care for others demonstrate positive social attitudes (Kanza et al., 2025; Lubis, 2019). Parents who actively teach values such as helping others, respecting others, and sharing are able to foster empathy in their children. This is in line with Hoffman's theory of moral development, which emphasizes the importance of empathy as the basis for prosocial behavior.

However, the main challenge found in this study is the low awareness of some parents regarding the importance of moral education at home. Parents with higher education backgrounds do not always show active involvement in character building for their children. Busy work schedules, social pressures, and the assumption that schools will take care of children's moral education are hindering factors. This phenomenon shows a gap between academic knowledge and parenting practices. The unrestricted use of gadgets by children without supervision is one of the factors that worsens children's moral condition. Children tend to imitate behaviors from digital media that are not in accordance with social and religious norms. Foul language, rude behavior, and a lack of respect for parents are symptoms that arise from exposure to unfiltered digital content. These findings are in line with research by (Aslan, 2019), which highlights the negative impact of the digital age on parenting and children's behavior.

In the local context of Kampung Taratak, traditional values that previously guided the community's way of life are beginning to be eroded by digital culture. Children are more familiar with virtual characters than community or religious figures. The role of parents as guardians of local values is becoming increasingly important in preserving children's cultural and moral identity. This study contributes to the understanding that moral education is not only universal, but must also be contextual and based on local values. The researchers also found that open communication between parents and children is key to successfully instilling moral values. Children who feel heard and valued tend to be more open to parental advice and guidance. Conversely, authoritarian or closed communication patterns can lead to resistance and deviant behavior. These findings support a democratic parenting

approach that emphasizes dialogue and child participation in the parenting process.

From a theoretical perspective, the results of this study reinforce Bronfenbrenner's view of child development ecology, in which microenvironments such as the family have a direct influence on children's moral development. Intensive and meaningful interactions between parents and children are the main foundation for the formation of values. Therefore, moral education interventions must begin with strengthening the role of the family as the child's primary environment. This study also provides space for critical reflection on educational policies that place too much emphasis on academic aspects and neglect character education. Schools do have a role in moral development, but they cannot replace the function of the family. Therefore, synergy between families and schools is important to create a holistic and sustainable educational ecosystem.

The interpretation of the research results shows that the research objectives have been achieved, namely to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of parents in instilling moral values in early childhood in the digital age. These findings provide empirical evidence that active and conscious parental involvement has a positive impact on children's character development. This research also opens up opportunities for the development of parenting programs based on moral values and digital literacy. The impact of these research results is not only academic but also practical. Parents, educators, and policymakers can use these findings as a basis for designing parenting and moral education strategies that are relevant to the challenges of the times. Digital literacy for parents is an urgent need so that they are able to wisely guide their children in using technology.

Previous researchers such as (Limpad et al., 2025; Nasution et al., 2024) also emphasized the importance of effective parenting in shaping children's character. This study expands on their research by adding local and digital dimensions as interacting variables. Thus, this study contributes to the development of contextual and adaptive parenting theory.

Overall, this discussion shows that early childhood moral education is a shared responsibility between families, schools, and communities. Parents have a strategic position as the first and foremost educators, who must be supported by a social environment and public policies that support character building. The digital age is not a threat if parents are able to carry out their roles wisely and consciously (Ika & Sholikin, 2024; Wahdini, 2024). Thus, this study not only answers scientific questions but also provides direction for more meaningful social change. Early childhood moral education must be a priority in the development of human resources that are ethical, competitive, and capable of facing global challenges with strong values.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the role of parents in instilling moral values in early childhood in the digital age greatly determines the direction of a child's character development, particularly in terms of psychological aspects, temperament, and empathy. The absence of parents in moral upbringing, even those with higher education, shows that parenting literacy and awareness of values have not been fully internalized. Therefore, an educational approach is needed that not only emphasizes academic achievement but also equips parents with the understanding and skills to guide their children morally in the midst of the digital era. These findings can be applied in the form of values-based parenting programs, family digital literacy training, and collaboration between educational institutions and the community to strengthen the role of the family as the center of character building for children from an early age.

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