



Parents' Strategies in Influencing Islamic Religious Education in Generation Z Students in The Digital Era: A Study of Parents

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Abstract

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to parenting patterns, particularly in instilling Islamic religious education in Generation Z children living in a digital ecosystem. This qualitative descriptive study aims to explain how digital technology influences parental strategies in internalising Islamic values in children. The study was conducted at MA Sholihyyah Kalitengah, with participants limited to parents who have Generation Z children enrolled at the institution, in order to obtain an in-depth contextual understanding. The results indicate that digital technology plays a role in enriching parenting methods through the provision of a variety of Islamic learning media, such as Quran applications, educational videos, and interactive Islamic teaching content. Furthermore, technology enables religious oversight through digital controls, such as parental controls and screen time management. Parents also adopt a collaborative approach by accompanying their children when accessing religious content to avoid misinformation. On the other hand, challenges arise in the form of exposure to negative content, digital distractions, and a decline in the intensity of direct spiritual communication. Thus, digital technology is an ambivalent factor: it can be an effective tool in Islamic education when used in a targeted and supervised manner, but it also has the potential to undermine religious values if not managed properly. These findings emphasise the need for religious digital literacy for parents to ensure that Islamic education strategies remain relevant and effective for Generation Z.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Digital Technology, Generation Z, Parental Role

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INTRODUCTION

مقدمة

Islamic religious education constitutes the primary foundation for shaping a Muslim's character, morality, and spirituality. Within this framework, the family particularly parents occupies a central position as the first and most influential educators in a child's religious development (Iqbal et al., 2024). This responsibility is normatively grounded in the Qur'anic injunction of Surah At-Tahrim (6), which mandates believers to safeguard themselves and their families from moral and spiritual destruction. Such a mandate affirms that Islamic religious education is not exclusively the domain of formal institutions but must be initiated and continuously nurtured within the family environment. Consequently, the Muslim family functions as the principal locus for the internalisation of faith (īmān), moral conduct (akhlāq), and religious obligations (ʿibādah) (Riadi, 2024).

However, socio-technological transformations in the digital era have fundamentally altered the context in which family-based religious education operates. Children born between 1995 and 2010 commonly identified as Generation Z have grown up as digital natives who are deeply

immersed in internet-based technologies, social media, and mobile devices (Tatasari et al., 2025). For this generation, digital space is not merely a medium of entertainment but also a primary arena for learning, social interaction, and identity construction. From a conceptual standpoint, this condition positions digital technology as a mediating variable that reshapes how religious values are accessed, interpreted, and internalised within the family.

On the one hand, digital technology offers significant pedagogical opportunities for Islamic religious education. Access to digital Qur'an applications, online lectures, virtual study circles, and interactive da'wah platforms enables religious learning to occur in ways that align with the learning preferences of Generation Z (Noor, 2025). These developments suggest that Islamic values can be transmitted through digital media in forms that are more engaging, flexible, and contextual, thereby potentially strengthening religious understanding and practice among digitally oriented youth.

On the other hand, digitalisation simultaneously introduces substantial challenges that may undermine the effectiveness of family-based religious education. The proliferation of disinformation, hate speech, privacy violations, digital addiction, and psychological disturbances has become increasingly pervasive among younger generations. In certain contexts, digital media may even produce a simulated reality (simulacra) that distorts religious understanding and moral judgement (Indrian & Sitorus, 2025). Empirical data from the We Are Social Indonesia Digital Report (2023) indicates that Indonesians spend more than seven hours per day on the internet, a pattern that has contributed to weakened intra-family communication and reduced face-to-face interaction between parents and children. As a result, parental authority as religious educators is often diminished, while digital figures such as influencers and YouTubers increasingly function as alternative sources of moral and religious reference.

This situation is further exacerbated by a pronounced digital literacy gap between parents and their Generation Z children. Many parents from Generation X or early millennial cohorts possess limited technological competence, constraining their capacity to supervise, guide, and critically engage with the digital environments inhabited by their children. In response, some parents relinquish religious education entirely to formal institutions, while others adopt overly restrictive or authoritarian approaches that generate tension and resistance. These divergent parental responses reflect the absence of a coherent and adaptive framework for Islamic religious education within digitally mediated family contexts.

Moreover, the pedagogical approaches employed by parents tend to remain conventional, relying heavily on one-way communication, moral exhortation, or punitive measures. Such approaches are increasingly misaligned with the characteristics of Generation Z, who are generally more dialogical, critical, and accustomed to interactive learning environments (Rianda, 2024; Ismaniya & Rofiq, 2025). This pedagogical mismatch often produces emotional and psychological distance, thereby impeding the internalisation of Islamic values.

From an academic perspective, existing studies on Islamic religious education have predominantly concentrated on formal settings such as schools and madrasahs, while the family as a primary educational arena remains underexplored, particularly within the context of digital transformation. Likewise, research on Generation Z has largely emphasised technological behaviour, social interaction, or psychological dimensions, with limited attention to parental strategies for religious value transmission in digitally saturated environments. This reveals a clear research gap at the intersection of family-based Islamic education, digital technology, and Generation Z parenting practices, especially from the lived experiences of Muslim parents.

Based on this gap, several critical issues emerge: (1) uncontrolled digital exposure increases the vulnerability of Generation Z to value disorientation; (2) diminishing parent–child communication weakens the effectiveness of religious education at home; (3) disparities in digital literacy hinder parental guidance; and (4) conventional religious pedagogies fail to resonate with Generation Z learning characteristics. Despite the significance of these issues, empirical studies that systematically examine how Muslim parents negotiate these challenges remain scarce.

Therefore, this research is both theoretically and practically urgent. Theoretically, it seeks to contribute to the development of a conceptual framework for family-based Islamic religious education that integrates digital literacy, parental mediation, and value internalisation in the context of Generation Z. Practically, the findings are expected to inform parents and educational institutions in designing more adaptive, dialogical, and context-sensitive religious education strategies. By focusing on the experiences of parents of students at MA Sholihyyah, this study aims to illuminate how Islamic values are negotiated, transmitted, and sustained within Muslim families amid the complexities of the digital era, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on contemporary Islamic education (Anshori, 2022).

METHOD

منهج

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore Muslim parents' experiences and strategies in providing Islamic religious education to Generation Z children in the digital era. Phenomenology was selected to capture parents' lived experiences and meanings related to digital challenges and religious parenting practices within the family context (Sugiyono, 2010). In accordance with Bogdan and Taylor's perspective (as cited in Moleong, 2010), qualitative research enables the production of descriptive data derived from participants' narratives and observed behaviours, allowing for an in-depth interpretation of social phenomena.

The study was conducted from October to November 2025 at MA Sholihyyah. Participants consisted of parents of students belonging to Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2010), with a focus on those parenting adolescents due to their vulnerability to digital influences and identity formation processes. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives and their ability to provide rich and meaningful data. A total of five parents participated in the study. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. The number of participants was determined by data saturation, as indicated by the recurrence of themes and the absence of new information.

To ensure data credibility, triangulation and member checking were applied. Triangulation involved comparing interview data with observational notes and relevant documentation related to family-based Islamic education practices. Member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries and preliminary interpretations to participants to confirm accuracy and consistency with their perspectives.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the research objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature of participation, and informed consent was obtained. Participants' confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the omission of identifying information. All data were used solely for academic purposes.

RESULT | نتائج

Strategies Used by Parents to Instil Islamic Religious Values in Generation Z Children in the Digital Era

In the context of rapid technological development, parents face new challenges in instilling Islamic religious values in Generation Z children. This generation grows up surrounded by gadgets, social media, and an unlimited flow of information. Unlike previous generations, they are highly visual, quick to absorb information, and easily influenced by global culture mediated through digital platforms. Therefore, parenting styles and religious education strategies within the family must adapt to these characteristics and utilise digital opportunities wisely.

Findings from this study at **MA Sholihyyah** indicate that parents are increasingly aware that traditional, instruction-based religious education alone is insufficient. One parent explained:

“Children today are different. If we only tell them to pray or read the Qur’an without showing it and without connecting it to their world, they tend to ignore it. They learn more from what they see than what they hear.” (Mr. Iksan)

This statement confirms Purnama’s (2022) argument that children’s religiosity is closely related to parenting styles and daily religious practices modelled within the family.

Parental Role Modelling as the Primary Strategy

One of the most dominant strategies identified is **parental role modelling (uswah)**. Parents become the primary figures observed and imitated by children, not only in religious worship but also in how they interact with digital technology. From a social learning perspective (Bandura in Purnama, 2022), Generation Z children internalise values more effectively when they observe consistency between religious instruction and daily behaviour.

A parent at MA Sholihyyah stated:

“If I ask my child to reduce screen time, I also try not to be busy with my phone at home. When they see me praying on time and using my phone wisely, they follow naturally.” (Mr. Zaini)

This finding shows that role modelling extends beyond ritual worship to include ethical digital behaviour, making religious values more concrete and contextual for Generation Z.

Dialogic Religious Communication in the Digital Context

Another key strategy is **open and dialogic religious communication**. Parents emphasised the importance of explaining Islamic values rationally and contextually, especially when children encounter diverse information online. This approach aligns with the cognitive and critical characteristics of Generation Z.

One informant explained:

“My child often asks why certain content is not good according to Islam. Instead of forbidding directly, I explain the reasons and relate them to Islamic teachings. That way, they understand, not just obey.” (Mr. Ali)

This dialogical pattern supports Aziz’s (2022) assertion that open communication prevents misunderstanding and strengthens internalisation of religious values amid digital exposure.

Digital Supervision and Parental Digital Literacy

The findings also reveal that parents apply **digital supervision strategies**, such as screen time regulation, content filtering, and accompanying children when accessing online content. However, parents acknowledged that these strategies require adequate digital literacy.

As one parent noted:

“Honestly, controlling children’s gadgets is not easy if we don’t understand technology. I had to learn about parental control apps so I could guide my child better.” (Mrs. Siti Aminah)

This empirical evidence reinforces Soraya’s (2022) findings that parents’ limited digital literacy can weaken their ability to guide children in navigating digital spaces.

Utilising Islamic Digital Media as a Religious Learning Tool

Rather than viewing technology solely as a threat, parents actively utilised Islamic digital media such as Qur’an applications, online lectures, and educational Islamic videos. This strategy aligns with Generation Z’s preference for visual and interactive learning formats.

One participant stated:

“My child prefers listening to Islamic podcasts or watching short Islamic videos rather than reading long books. So I guide them to content that is trustworthy and appropriate.” (Mrs. Umi)

This finding supports Rahman’s (2025) argument that families who actively direct children to quality Islamic digital content achieve better outcomes in strengthening religious understanding.

Habituation of Religious Practices within the Family

Despite technological integration, parents consistently emphasised the importance of **habitual religious practices** within the family, such as congregational prayer, Qur’an recitation, and regular religious routines. These practices function as emotional and spiritual anchors amid digital distractions.

Consistent with Pramitha (2024), this study found that such routines create a safe spiritual space where children experience Islam as a lived reality rather than abstract instruction.

Table 1. Strategies Used by Parents to Instil Islamic Values in Generation Z Children in the Digital Era

Research Result	Information
Role Modelling	Children internalise Islamic values more effectively through consistent examples in worship, morals, and digital behaviour.
Dialogic Religious Communication	Open and rational discussions help children contextualise Islamic teachings in their digital lives.
Digital Supervision and Literacy	Parental control, mentoring, and digital competence are essential to protect children from negative content.
Use of Islamic Digital Media	Qur’an apps, Islamic videos, podcasts, and online studies enhance engagement and understanding.
Family-Based Religious Habituation	Congregational prayer and religious routines strengthen children’s spiritual attachment.

Synthesis of Findings: The Emergence of Digital Religious Parenting

Overall, the findings indicate that digital technology significantly shapes parental strategies in instilling Islamic religious education among Generation Z students at MA Sholihyyah. Parents

no longer function solely as instructors but as **role models, dialogue partners, digital mentors, and spiritual companions**. The integration of traditional Islamic values with digital literacy gives rise to a new parenting pattern known as **digital religious parenting**.

This model demonstrates that technology is not inherently contradictory to Islamic education; rather, when guided by religious values, supervision, and parental example, it becomes a powerful medium for strengthening children's religiosity in the digital era.

DISCUSSION

مناقشة

Islamic religious education in the digital age requires parents to continuously adapt their parenting practices in response to rapid technological change. Parents function not only as transmitters of religious knowledge but also as primary role models whose everyday behaviour plays a decisive role in shaping children's Islamic identity. Empirical studies consistently show that modelling religious values through daily practices is more effective than verbal instruction alone, as children tend to internalise values through observation and imitation (Zaida, 2023).

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of parental role modelling is increasingly constrained by structural challenges, particularly the intergenerational gap in digital literacy between parents and Generation Z children. While children are generally more fluent in navigating digital platforms, many parents lack sufficient technological competence to fully understand online environments, content algorithms, and digital risks. This imbalance often weakens parental supervision in digital spaces, even when strong religious values are present within the family. Consequently, parental digital literacy emerges as a crucial foundation for maintaining effective religious guidance in the digital era (Syihab, 2024).

Beyond the issue of digital competence, parents also face growing pressure from global digital culture, which exposes children to transnational values that may conflict with Islamic moral principles. Without adequate parental mediation, children may experience fragmented value formation as religious teachings compete with dominant digital narratives promoting individualism, consumerism, and instant gratification. In this context, digitally literate parents are better positioned to act as cultural mediators, enabling children to critically engage with digital content while maintaining religious boundaries (Syihab, 2024).

At the same time, research highlights that digital technology should not be viewed solely as a threat. When managed appropriately, technology offers significant opportunities to enrich Islamic religious education through Quran applications, Islamic educational videos, and online religious learning platforms. However, these opportunities must be accompanied by active parental supervision to mitigate risks such as exposure to harmful content and digital dependency (Rahman, 2024).

To address these challenges, value-based and dialogical family communication becomes increasingly important. Open discussions, moral affirmation, and contextual explanations allow parents to translate Islamic teachings into meanings that are relevant to children's digital experiences. Such communication not only strengthens religious internalisation but also helps bridge generational and cultural gaps within the family (Asy-Syauqi et al., 2025).

Overall, the literature suggests that the success of Islamic religious education in the digital age depends on the integration of parental role modelling, digital literacy, and awareness of broader structural pressures. Rather than positioning technology as an opposing force, parents

are required to manage it strategically as a complementary tool to sustain children's Islamic identity amid the dynamics of global digital culture.

CONCLUSSION | خاتمة

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to the pattern of The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to the patterns of Islamic religious education within the family environment, particularly for Generation Z children who were born and raised as digital natives. Technology not only presents challenges in the form of exposure to negative content and the weakening of direct family communication, but also offers new opportunities as a more engaging and interactive medium for religious learning. Consequently, parents' strategies for instilling Islamic values must shift from purely conventional approaches toward digital religious parenting, which integrates parental role modelling, dialogic communication, digital supervision, and the purposeful use of Islamic applications and digital media.

The success of Islamic religious education in the digital era depends largely on parents' ability to enhance their digital literacy, adapt their approaches to the visual, critical, and autonomous characteristics of Generation Z, and create synergy between the cultivation of religious practices at home and the positive utilisation of technology. These findings extend the understanding that religious parenting in the digital era is not merely a matter of control, but rather a form of pedagogical collaboration that integrates values, technology, and emotional communication. Through adaptive and comprehensive strategies, families can remain the primary bulwark in shaping children's moral character and spiritual development, even amid the complexities of the digital landscape.

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