

Strategies for Internalizing Religious Character Values Through Digital Storytelling at Madrasah Ibtidaiah Hidayatus Shibyan

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ABSTRACT

The digital era presents a disruptive challenge for character education, where conventional learning methods often fail to resonate with the interests of the digital native generation and trigger the phenomenon of student moral degradation that is increasingly rampant. Therefore, innovative pedagogical strategies are needed that are able to bridge these gaps by integrating religious values through visual-narrative media that are relevant to the student ecosystem. This study aims to: 1) Analyze the Implementation Strategy of Digital Storytelling in PAI Learning; 2) Identify the Content of Religious Character Values Integrated in PAI Learning; 3) Evaluate the Implications of Media Use on Student Responses and Behaviors. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design at Madrasah Ibtidaiah Hidayatus Shibyan, where data is collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana interactive models. The results of the study show that: 1) The implementation strategy is carried out systematically through careful narrative content planning, curriculum integration, and school culture habituation supported by the active role of teachers as facilitators; 2) The content of the main character values that have been successfully internalized includes aspects of piety, honesty, politeness, helping, and love for the Apostle; and 3) The use of digital storytelling has significant implications in increasing students' cognitive attention, deepening value appreciation, and encouraging the transformation of affective behavior into concrete moral morals in daily life.

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INTRODUCTION

The formation of character based on religious values is an important element in the Indonesian education system, especially at the basic education level, which plays a vital role in fostering attitudes, values, and behaviors in children. Along with the rapid advancement of digital technology, the challenges in developing characters have become more complicated, as the current generation grows up in a digital environment that influences the way they think, learn, and behave. Therefore, a teaching method is needed that not only emphasizes the cultivation of conventional religious values, but is also relevant and in accordance with the characteristics of the generation living in this digital era (Nurbaiti et al., 2020). Theoretically, the internalization of religious character values

demands a meaningful learning process involving cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, as affirmed in the theory of character education and constructivistic learning (Rizal & Munip, 2017).

In an ideal situation, the learning of religious character in madrassas should not be limited to the delivery of knowledge alone, but also includes the formation of attitudes and behaviors that students believe. This process needs to be in line with the times, especially considering the important role of digital technology in children's lives. The storytelling method, which has long been valued as an effective way to teach moral values, must be adapted to the digital environment in order to create a more engaging, interactive, and relevant learning experience for the generation that grew up with technology (Haryadi & Ulumuddin, 2018); Rahiem, 2021). By utilizing digital visual communication media, moral and religious messages are expected to be conveyed more effectively and imprinted in children's memories (Narimo & Sanusi, 2020; Dhori & Nurhayati, 2022; Nurhayati et al., 2022).

However, the real conditions on the ground show a significant gap. Although character education is important, the phenomenon of moral degradation and student delinquency is still rampant, even increasing after the COVID-19 pandemic. The main challenges faced are the lack of innovative strategies, where traditional learning methods often no longer resonate with students' interests, as well as the limitations of teachers' skills in utilizing digital media (Sari & Handayani, 2022; Jumarnis et al., 2023; Sabrina et al., 2021). Many implementations *Storytelling* is still conventional and has not optimized the potential of technology, so that the moral message conveyed is less able to attract students' imagination in depth (Holidi et al., 2021; Husada et al., 2020; Istiani & Islamy, 2020).

Various literature has examined attempts to internalize character values, but the majority still have a fragmented focus. Most studies focus on the habituation of religious activities in general or the use of *Storytelling* without adequate technology integration. Although previous research has acknowledged the effectiveness of *Storytelling* in instilling moral values, exploration of the use of specific digital formats for the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is still limited (Nurbaiti et al., 2020; Fahmi & Susanto, 2018; Haryadi & Ulumuddin, 2018). Criticism of existing studies shows the need for a new approach that combines the power of narrative with digital visual appeal to address the challenges of character education in the modern era.

Departing from these problems, this research is focused on analyzing the strategy of internalizing the value of religious characters through digital storytelling at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan. In order to position the *novelty* and originality of the research, the researcher refers to a number of relevant previous studies as a comparative reference, including:

Research conducted by Haryadi and Ulumuddin (2018) with the title "Instilling Values and Morals in Elementary School Children with an Approach *Storytelling* Through Visual Communication Media" highlights the potential of *Storytelling* supported by visual communication media in instilling values and morals in elementary school children. This study argues that the development of visual communication media creates opportunities to revive culture *Storytelling* that have been abandoned. The similarity with the research to be carried out is the use of *Storytelling* and visual media as a tool for instilling value. The difference is Haryadi and Ulumuddin (2018) Focus more on potential *Storytelling* visual, while this study specifically examines *Digital storytelling* as a strategy for internalizing the value of religious character in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon, with implications for its direct implementation and measurement of effectiveness. Digital approach *Storytelling* offers interactive and multidimensional dimensions that have not been fully explored in the context of instilling religious values in MI.

The second research was conducted by Fahmi and Susanto (2018) with the title "Implementation of Islamic Education Habituation in Shaping the Religious Character of Elementary School Students". The study revealed that habits such as praying in congregation, reading the letters of the Quran, and speaking politely have a significant influence on the development of religious character. The similarities with this study lie in its focus which highlights the habituation of Islamic education and the formation of religious character at the elementary school level. However, the difference is that Fahmi and Susanto (2018) applied the action research method with the subject of 5th grade students from SDN Tambak Romo 2, and did not specifically discuss the use of digital

media or *Storytelling* as a strategy. On the other hand, this study will investigate the use of *Storytelling* digital as an innovative approach to achieve the same goal.

The third research by Rahiem (2021) titled "*Storytelling in Early childhood education: Time to go digital*" explicitly discusses the transition *Storytelling* to the digital realm in early childhood education. Although it does not specifically address religious character, the study provides a foundation for effectiveness and relevance *Storytelling* digital as an educational tool. An equation is the acceptance that *Storytelling* Digital is an effective approach in education. The difference, Rahiem (2021) focuses on early childhood education in general, while the research to be carried out directs its focus on the internalization of religious character values in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon. In addition, Rahiem (2021) is a conceptual study, while this research will involve an implementation study to measure the effectiveness of the practice. This provides an opportunity to fill in gaps in the literature by testing specific applications *Storytelling* digital for religious characters in madrasahs.

This research offers a significant novelty compared to previous studies through its focus on "Strategies for Internalizing Religious Character Values Through *Storytelling* Digital: Implementation Study at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon". Although many studies have examined the formation of religious character through habitual religious activities (Fahmi & Susanto, 2018; Narimo & Sanusi, 2020), and some also research the use of *Storytelling* to instill moral values (Haryadi & Ulumuddin, 2018); Ramdhani et al., 2019; Holidi et al., 2021), there has been no specific and in-depth research that has specifically and analyzed the effectiveness of *Digital storytelling* as the main strategy for internalizing the value of religious character in the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The main novelty lies in the integration of three key elements: (1) the internalization of the value of religious character, (2) through the *Storytelling*, and (3) implemented in a *Digital*, specifically in MI students. Previous research on *Digital storytelling* tend to focus on early childhood education in general or other contexts such as health (Rahiem, 2021); de Jager et al., 2017; Moreau et al., 2018), not on religious character education in MI.

This study aims to analyze the strategy of internalizing religious character values through digital *storytelling*, identify the content of integrated values, and evaluate its impact on students' responses and behaviors. In detail, this study aims to: 1) Analyze the Implementation Strategy of Digital *Storytelling* in PAI Learning; 2) Identify the Content of Religious Character Values Integrated in PAI Learning; 3) Evaluate the Implications of Media Use on Student Responses and Behaviors. The benefits of this research are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of PAI pedagogy and practical guidance for teachers in utilizing technology. The research variables studied included implementation strategies (planning and implementation), types of religious character values (such as honesty and piety), and the effectiveness of media on students' understanding and attitudes.

The urgency of this study arises from the increasing challenges of moral degradation and the ineffectiveness of conventional religious character education methods in engaging digital native students, making innovative technology-based learning approaches urgently needed in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on integrating digital storytelling as a strategic medium for internalizing religious character values in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), which has rarely been explored comprehensively in the context of MI students.

METHODS

This study applies a descriptive qualitative method with a case study design, which aims to gain in-depth insights into the strategy of internalizing values of religious character through *Storytelling* in the context of education at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to reveal the process, meaning, and dynamics of the implementation of character education in a contextual and holistic manner, especially in digital technology-based learning practices (Rizal & Munip, 2017); Dhori & Nurhayati, 2022; Nurhayati et al., 2022). The design of the case study is relevant to the current educational research trends that emphasize the in-depth exploration of innovative practices in a particular educational unit as a representation of specific phenomena (Pakpahan & Habibah, 2021; Arifin et al., 2023).

Participants from this study were selected through the Purposive sampling method, paying attention to the direct participation and important position of each subject in the application *Storytelling* digital as a means of internalizing the values of spiritual character. The informants of this research consisted of 5 people, including the deputy head of curriculum and religion, classroom teachers, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, and 2 students of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon. The selection of this subject is in line with a cutting-edge qualitative research approach that emphasizes the diversity of perspectives of education stakeholders in order to obtain rich, credible, and contextual data (Nurbaiti et al., 2020; Pakpahan & Habibah, 2021).

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the perceptions, experiences, and strategies of teachers and madrasah managers in internalizing the value of religious character through digital media (Holidi et al., 2021; Istiani & Islamy, 2020). Documentation includes analysis of learning tools, content *Storytelling* digital activities, activity photos, and madrasah archives as supporting data that strengthens field findings (Nurhayati et al., 2022; Putri & Eliza, 2023).

Data analysis was carried out interactively referring to the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña models, including steps for data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification (Nurdin & Nugroho, 2021). Data reduction was carried out by selecting relevant information in line with the focus of the research, especially implementation strategies, religious character values, and the influence of digital storytelling on student behavior (Pakpahan & Habibah, 2021). The data is then presented in a thematic narrative format and an analysis matrix to make it easier to find patterns and relationships between findings. The process of drawing conclusions takes place gradually and is verified through triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure the validity and credibility of the research results (Pakpahan & Habibah, 2021; (Dhori & Nurhayati, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Role of PAI Teachers in Facing Digital Challenges

This chapter will explain the results and in-depth discussion of the strategy of internalizing religious character values through digital *storytelling* at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon. The discussion will outline the findings of the research based on the sub-chapter framework that has been determined, namely the strategy for implementing *digital storytelling* in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, the content of integrated religious character values, and the implications of the use of this media on student responses and behaviors. This analysis is based on data collected and interpretation of various relevant literature, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of this approach in the formation of religious character of primary school-age children.

a. Digital Storytelling Implementation Strategies in PAI Learning

Implementation *Storytelling* digital PAI learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon is an innovative strategy that utilizes technology to achieve the goal of religious character education. Various studies have shown that *Storytelling* has great potential in instilling moral values and character in children (Rusiyono & Apriani, 2020; Turahmat et al., 2019). When this method is integrated with digital media, its potential is increasing, especially for the younger generation who are familiar with technology (Rahiem, 2021). *Storytelling* Digital, which is generally a short-form audio-visual clip, incorporating photographs, sound narration, and other audio elements, has proven effective in a variety of contexts, including as an art-based research method and knowledge transfer tool (Husada et al., 2020).

In the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon, the strategy of implementing *digital storytelling* in PAI learning involves several stages and approaches.

1) Careful planning

Success An educational innovation relies heavily on planning maturity. From an education management perspective, Pakpahan and Habibah (2021) Affirms that character education program planning should be derived from a clear vision, mission, and goals, and include short- to long-term

design. This theory empirically confirmed at the research site. The Deputy Head of Curriculum (WK) explained the planning flow which is *top-down* yet adaptive:

"So this is how we start with planning by setting a clear vision and mission of the program. We want this method to be systematic, not just entertainment. We plan short and long-term programs... We also emphasize the selection of digital formats that are suitable for children of MI age so that the message gets through." (Interview with WK, January 20, 2026).

This statement shows that madrassas have gone beyond the "technology adoption phase" to the strategic phase. Furthermore, this planning strategy also accommodates the psychological aspects of student development. Rahiem (2021) and Kusumastuti and Rukiyati (2017) argue that learning methods for early childhood should be interesting and easy to understand. This is responded to by PAI Teachers (GP) through a selection of specific materials and formats:

"I usually choose material that is sourced from Islamic stories... For the format, because MI students are the visual generation, I choose an animated video or e-book with a voice narration."

The synthesis between curriculum policies (vision) and understanding students' characteristics as *visual learners* (psychology) is the foundation of a solid strategy in this madrasah.

2) Curriculum integration

Storytelling digital can not only be an independent activity, but it can also be integrated in any PAI subject. Rizal and Munip (2017) found that integrating character values in the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) is an important strategy carried out by classroom teachers. The concrete implementation of this strategy can be seen from the preparation of the RPP which makes *Storytelling* as a core method, not just an interlude. The PAI teacher explained:

"Integrating character values in the lesson plan is the key strategy... In the lesson plan, I list when the video will be played and what value you want to explore..." (Interview with GP, January 20, 2026)

This data confirms that *Storytelling* Digital has been institutionalized in madrasah academic documents. Interesting discussions arise on the *How* digital content is used. Dalimunthe and Pohan (2023) suggested the use of the story of the Prophet and the Companions as the main material. At MI Hidayatus Shibyan, this strategy was further developed to make digital content as Cognitive Bridge for abstract material (such as Aqidah Akhlak). The PAI teacher explained:

"For example, in Aqidah Akhlak, the material is about 'Commendable Morals', so I take a digital story about honesty... So the digital content becomes a bridge to explain material that is abstract in nature to concrete."

Strategy This proves its effectiveness *Storytelling* in concretizing theological concepts that are often difficult for elementary / middle school students to understand, as mentioned in the research Husada et al. (2020) regarding the role of visuals in knowledge transfer.

3) Varied media use

Development of thematic teaching materials with visual methods *Storytelling* has been proven to be valid, effective, and practical for elementary school students (Haryadi & Ulumuddin, 2018). Various visual media, such as pillar books, digital storybooks, virtual hand puppets, or videos, can be used to tell stories (Kusumastuti & Rukiyati, 2017). The media diversification strategy is clearly seen in the field, as revealed by the Classroom Teacher (GK):

"The most common are short audio-visual clips or animated videos. Sometimes you also use interactive presentations or digital storybooks... This variety is important so that children don't get bored."

However, the implementation of this strategy faces real challenges. Manshur and Isroani (2023) highlighting that the lack of media or teacher skills can be a hindrance. This is acknowledged by the madrasah, where the availability of "quality content" is an issue in itself even though the physical infrastructure (laptop/projector) is adequate.

"The school fully supports its facilities... However, the challenge is sometimes in the availability of quality story content stock, that's why schools also support training for teachers."

These findings indicate that implementation strategies are not enough just by procuring tools (*Hardware*), but demands an investment in content (*Software*) and human resource development (*Brainware*). It is important to ensure that the digital media used is easily accessible, relevant to the age of the students, and able to capture their attention. The availability of a wide range of digital storybooks and storytelling training for teachers is also a significant supporting factor (Kusumastuti & Rukiyati, 2017).

4) Habituation and Role of Teachers

Religious character cannot be formed instantly, but must go through a consistent process of habituation and cultivation (Tambak et al., 2020; Hidayati et al., 2021; Dhori & Nurhayati, 2022). *Storytelling* digital can be part of the habituation of religious activities at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. For example, short stories about honesty, obedience, or compassion could be played each morning before the lesson starts, or as a conclusion to PAI learning activities. This habit will form a school environment that is conducive to the cultivation of religious values (Narimo & Sanusi, 2020; Nuraeni & Labudasari, 2021).

This strategy also includes the active participation of educators. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers act as the "front line" in instilling character values, which means they have the most interaction time with students (Rizal & Munip, 2017). Teachers must be able to be good role models and have skills in telling stories in an interesting way and living moral messages (Kusumastuti & Rukiyati, 2017). Istiani and Islamy (2020) However, Istiani and Islamy (2020) remind that teachers must have storytelling skills and live the message. The lack of learning media or teachers' skills in storytelling can be an inhibiting factor, so adequate training and provision of resources are needed (Manshur & Isroani, 2023).

Field data shows that teachers at MI Hidayatus Shibyan consciously take the position of active facilitators to mitigate the passive risk of students. The PAI teacher affirmed:

"I position myself as a facilitator and role model. Once the video played, I didn't shut up. I would like to invite students to discuss... I have to be able to bring the moral message with appreciation so that it reaches the hearts of children."

This post-live engagement strategy is changing *Views* become *Guidelines*. This is in line with the view Hariandi and Irawan (2016) that the example and interaction of teachers remains irreplaceable by no matter how sophisticated technology. The Classroom Teacher (GK) also added that despite the technical obstacles in adaptation, the teacher's enthusiasm for learning is the key to success: "But because this is the 'spearhead of success, teachers continue to learn."

Overall, the implementation *Storytelling* effective digital learning in PAI learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon requires careful planning, proper curriculum integration, varied media utilization, and consistent habituation, supported by competent and dedicated teachers (Dhori & Nurhayati, 2022). This approach leverages the appeal of technology to facilitate the absorption of religious values in students more effectively and enjoyably.

b. Integrated Religious Character Value Content

Religious character education is an important foundation in shaping the morals and ethics of students, especially at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level (Fahmi & Susanto, 2018; Habibah & Wahyuni, 2020). Through *Storytelling* digital, various values of religious character can be integrated effectively and deeply (Nurhayati et al., 2022; Ramdhani et al., 2019). Previous studies have identified a wide range of religious values that can be developed and instilled in primary school students through a variety of approaches, most of which are also relevant to be integrated through methods *Storytelling* digital.

Based on the analysis of field data and literature synthesis, the character value content internalized in MI Hidayatus Shibyan is classified into the following five main points:

1) Piety and Habit of Worship

Devotion is a fundamental value that is integrated through visual narrative. Nurbaiti et al. (2020) identify that religious character includes piety, honesty, cleanliness, politeness, sincerity, competitiveness, helpfulness, love of the apostle, and gratitude. These values can be easily internalized through digital stories. Fahmi and Susanto (2018) emphasize the importance of habituating Islamic education to shape the religious character of elementary school students. Habits such as performing prayers, memorizing letters in the Quran, praying together, saying greetings, and speaking politely are indicators of changes in religious character.

In this context, digital *storytelling* supports this habituation by presenting stories that inspire students. Field findings confirm that digital visualization helps concretize abstract concepts of worship. PAI teacher at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan explained:

"The value of piety is very important. For example, stories about the merits of congregational prayer, the virtue of reading the Quran, and the importance of prayer. Through visuals, children understand 'oh this is how beautiful it is if you are diligent in worshipping.' (Interview with GP, January 20, 2026)

The effectiveness of this visual approach was recognized by students who felt motivated after watching the show: *"Yes, so be enthusiastic. The problem is that in the video it is said that Prayer will be loved by Allah and go to heaven."* (Interview with SW 1, January 20, 2026).

Further, Nuraeni and Labudasari (2021) found that religious school culture, such as the reading of short letters of the Quran, the reading of prayers together, as well as Dhuha and congregational prayers, had a significant effect on the religious character of students. *Storytelling* digital can enrich these activities by providing a visual narrative that explains the meaning and wisdom behind each religious activity. In addition, Pakpahan and Habibah (2021) and Habibah and Wahyuni (2020) also highlighted the integration of worship practices in the curriculum and culture of the school. *Storytelling* Digital in this madrasah enriches these activities by providing a visual narrative that explains the meaning and wisdom behind each religious activity.

2) Honesty (Integrity)

Value Honesty is the main focus in the formation of student integrity. Nurbaiti et al. (2020) placing honesty as one of the pillars of religious character in madrasahs. This value can be easily internalized through digital stories, such as stories about the honesty of the Prophets or role models. In the field, teachers apply cause-and-effect narrative strategies to instill these values. The Classroom Teacher (GK) explained:

"We use the exemplary stories of the Prophet or honest figures. In the story, it is shown that honesty brings goodness, while lying has bad consequences. So the concept of 'honest' seems real to them." (Interview with GK, January 20, 2026)

The impact of this method can be seen on the students' ability to reflect on the consequences of dishonesty: *"If you lie, you won't be trusted by your friends anymore. Like the story of an honest trader, he became successful."* (Interview with SW 2, January 20, 2026). This is in line with the findings Ramdhani et al. (2019) who report that *Storytelling* is able to instill the value of responsibility and honesty effectively.

3) Courtesy and Noble Morals

The formation of moral character is an essential goal of Islamic education. Fahmi and Susanto (2018) affirms that the habit of greeting and speaking politely is an important indicator of religious character. *Storytelling* Digital is a powerful medium to convey stories that portray karimah's morals, such as humility, patience, and forgiveness. The implementation of this value at MI Hidayatus Shibyan is carried out through visual modeling. The Classroom Teacher (GK) revealed:

"The value of politeness is a priority. The video exemplifies how to speak politely, greet, and respect parents. The children become imitating what they see on the screen." (Interview with GK, January 20, 2026)

Thus, students not only understand these concepts intellectually, but are also encouraged to implement them in their daily lives. Dhori and Nurhayati, (2022) states that the approach in building students' religious character is conveyed through subject matter and school atmosphere, where teachers have a very crucial role in the formation of religious character. The methods used include the example given, the storytelling technique (*Storytelling*), as well as the habits that are applied.

4) Help-Helping and Social Empathy

Value social concerns, although universal, are deeply aligned with the teachings of Islam. Dalimunthe and Pohan (2023) mentioned that the value of social care and helping can be integrated through stories about alms and sharing. Stories about kindness can build students' helpful character and empathy. PAI teachers at the research site used the stories of the Prophet's companions for this purpose:

"Many of the themes are about alms and sharing... For example, the story of the Prophet's companions who helped the poor. It builds the character of helping and caring for students." (Interview with GP, January 20, 2026)

The students' responses show the success of internalizing these values into behavioral intentions: *"I want to help. Pak Guru said in the video, we have to help so that we can get rewards and have many friends."* (Interview with SW 1, January 20, 2026).

5) Love of the Prophet (Example)

Ribbon Rasul is a specific value identified by Nurbaiti et al. (2020) As a Religious Character in the Madrasah. The introduction of the figure of the Prophet PBUH is not only as a historical figure, but as a central figure in the formation of morals. Field findings indicate content usage intensity *Sirah Nabawiyah* to achieve this goal. The PAI teacher stated:

"Quite often, because one of the target characters is Cinta Rasul. The story of the example of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH is presented to instill karimah morals." (Interview with GP, January 20, 2026)

Through this approach, students not only understand history cognitively, but are also inspired to apply the Prophet's morals in daily life.

Other moral values that can be instilled through stories include honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democratic nature, curiosity, the ability to be friendly or communicative, love of peace, love of reading, concern for the environment, social concern, and responsibility (Kusumastuti & Rukiyati, 2017; Ramdhani et al., 2019). These values, while not all of them are specifically religious, are deeply aligned with Islamic teachings and can be reinforced through the context of Islamic stories. For example, the values of social care and helping can be integrated through stories about giving alms, sharing, and helping others (Dalimunthe & Pohan, 2023).

The importance of the formation of moral character or noble character values is also the focus (Fahmi & Susanto, 2018). Digital usage *Storytelling* can serve as an effective tool to convey narratives that reflect good behavior, such as humility, patience, and forgiveness. This allows students to not only understand these ideas intellectually, but also to be encouraged to implement them in their daily activities. Dhori and Nurhayati, (2022) It is concluded that the method in shaping the religious character of students is carried out through subject matter and atmosphere in the school environment. The role of teachers is very important in shaping the religious character. The methods used include exemplary guides, storytelling methods, and habituation methods (Dhori & Nurhayati, 2022).

In general, *storytelling* at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon can function as an effective means to instill various values of religious character such as sincerity, integrity, ethics, mutual help, love for the apostles, cleanliness, gratitude, and other high morals. This approach allows the teaching of these values in an engaging, motivating, and easy-to-understand way for students, thus building a strong religious character from an early age.

c. Implications of Media Use on Student Responses and Behaviors

The use of digital *storytelling* media in internalizing the value of religious character in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon has significant implications for student responses and behaviors. Various studies show that *storytelling* methods, especially those supported by visual and digital media, are able to increase student engagement and influence their character formation.

1) Increased Cognitive Attention and Learning Interest

Among the big challenges in elementary education today is maintaining the duration of students' attention. Aulia et al. (2025) arguing that early childhood students have high curiosity but are easily distracted if the learning method is monotonous. *Storytelling* Digital offers solutions through audio-visual stimulation. Rahiem (2021) emphasizing that digital formats are able to attract students' imagination more strongly than oral narratives alone.

This theory is strongly validated by findings in the field. There is a sharp contrast between conventional and digital methods in terms of student enthusiasm. The Classroom Teacher (GK) provides an empirical comparison:

"Wow, it's a big difference... If they are regular talkers, sometimes they are sleepy, but if there are visuals and voice narration, their curiosity increases..." (Interview with GK, January 20, 2026)

This statement confirms the findings Istiani and Islamy (2020) that *Storytelling* Digital make PAI learning more alive. Deeper, student preferences show that the elements of motion and sound are key to attention retention. This was expressed directly by the students (SW 2): *"Love to see videos on the screen! The problem is that there are pictures of movements, there are funny sounds, so I don't get bored of learning."* This data strengthens the argument Husada et al. (2020) that the integration of photos and voice narratives is effective as a knowledge transfer tool because it is in accordance with the learning modalities of students *Digital Native*.

2) Appreciation of values

The implications of the media do not stop at the attraction of the eyes (visual), but permeate the appreciation of the heart (affective). Haryadi and Ulumuddin (2018) states that *Storytelling* allows the delivery of abstract moral messages to be *relatable* (easy to understand). At MI Hidayatus Shibyan, digital media serves as a visualization tool that helps students feel the emotions of the characters.

The Classroom Teacher (GK) noted a deep emotional response when students listened to the narrative content:

"That's right, it can be seen that the appreciation is very real. When the story is sad or inspiring, they are silent and listen seriously. That's a sign that they're developing empathy and understanding the feelings of the characters in the story."

This phenomenon supports the findings Retnasari et al. (2023) which mentions that storylines help students understand the feelings of others and develop empathy. In addition, the ability of students to retell plots and moral messages prove that cognitive processes have gone hand in hand with affective processes, as explained by Husada et al. (2020) Regarding the effectiveness of visualization in deepening the understanding of values.

d. Positive behavior changes

The most important discussion in character research is evidence of changes in behavior. Various sources have stated that there is a positive relationship between *Storytelling* and certain characters. Krisphianti et al. (2016) observes that the use of *Storytelling* With the media of puppet masks can effectively improve the character of justice in students. Sari et al. (2018) also underlined that the *storytelling* method contributes significantly to the development of cooperative character among students. Ramdhani et al. (2019) report that *storytelling* activities involving folklore can instill character values such as responsibility, independence, honesty, religiosity, and cooperation.

This study expands the findings with evidence of the transformation of religious (worship) and social behavior. The Deputy Head of Madrasah (WK) observed a concrete change from mere knowledge to habit:

"Gradually there is a transformation of affective behavior into concrete morals. We see them become more polite, and the habit of worship such as Dhuha prayer becomes more diligent because they are motivated by these stories."

In fact, behavioral changes are seen in children after getting *Treatment storytelling* is to show an attitude of helping, and giving to each other (Sari et al., 2018). The improvement in children's character manners was also seen significantly after the implementation *Storytelling* (Putri & Eliza, 2023). This is confirmed by the student's confession (SW 1) who began to internalize adab in their daily lives: *"I now like to greet when I enter the house, continue to help my mother tidy up. I don't want to be naughty with friends either."* This shows that the *Storytelling*, especially those that are digitally packaged, are able to provide cognitive understanding and encourage students to apply it in their daily lives.

e. Formation of good habits

The internalization of the value of religious character is characterized by habitualization of religious activities and moral behavior (Nurbaiti et al., 2020; Fahmi & Susanto, 2018). *Storytelling Digital* can be a powerful motivator to form positive habits. For example, stories about the virtues of Dhuha Prayer or reading the Quran can encourage students to be more diligent in practicing these worships at school and at home. With repetition and reinforcement through relevant stories, these good habits will be more rooted in students (Dhori & Nurhayati, 2022). Field data shows a real behavioral transformation, as conveyed by the Deputy Head of the Madrasah:

"Gradually there is a transformation of affective behavior into concrete morals. We see them becoming more polite..." (Interview with WK, January 20, 2026)

Matter this prove that the internalization of values does not stop at the cognitive level, but is manifested in actions (psychomotor). These findings are in line with the theory Nurbaiti et al. (2020) and Fahmi and Susanto (2018) which emphasizes that the indicator of the success of religious character is the habituation of religious activities.

However, it is worth noting several factors that may affect this implication. Lack of availability of digital learning media, inadequate teacher skills in adapting stories to digital formats, or lack of variety of stories can be inhibiting factors (Holidi et al., 2021; Kusumastuti & Rukiyati, 2017). Therefore, school support in providing facilities, training for teachers, and curating quality story content is essential to maximize positive impact *Storytelling digital*.

Overall, the application of digital *storytelling* in the learning process of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon has produced a significant positive impact. This media not only increases students' interest and understanding of religious character values, but also more importantly, encourages behavior change in a more constructive direction, builds good habits, and develops empathy and social concern. This approach is a relevant and efficient strategy in dealing with the challenges of declining morale in the digital era, by utilizing technology as a tool to create a comprehensive character in the younger generation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, the strategy of internalizing religious character values through *digital storytelling* at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan has proven to be an effective and relevant approach in answering educational challenges in the digital era. This study concludes that the implementation of the strategy involves careful planning, integration into the PAI curriculum, and the central role of teachers as facilitators who are able to adapt visual-audio narrative content to attract students' interest. The main religious character values that have been successfully internalized include piety, honesty, politeness, help, and love of the Prophet, where the

use of digital media is able to strengthen cognitive understanding while touching the affective aspects of students. This effectiveness is characterized by a positive response in the form of increased enthusiasm for learning and concrete changes in students' behavior that reflects moral character in daily interactions.

The theoretical implications of this study confirm that the internalization of religious character values in Ibtidaiyah madrasah students will be more effective if carried out through a contextual, narrative, and digital technology-based learning approach. *Digital storytelling* has proven to be able to bridge abstract religious values into concrete and meaningful learning experiences for students as digital native generations. Practically, the findings of this study provide implications for teachers, madrasah heads, and education policy makers that digital *storytelling* can be used as an alternative and innovative strategy in religious character education. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen teachers' competence in digital literacy, support for learning facilities and infrastructure, as well as madrasah policies that encourage the continuous integration of *digital storytelling* in the learning process and school religious activities.

Although these findings are significant, the study has limitations in the design of a single case study and a qualitative approach that captures student responses over a specific time span (*cross-sectional*), so it has not been able to verify the durability or resilience of these religious characters in the long term. In order to enrich the scientific treasures of the future, further research is suggested to go beyond implementation analysis by applying a longitudinal approach to measure the retention of character values over time. In addition, there are promising prospects to explore the concept of *participatory digital storytelling*, in which students are actively involved as content creators (narrative producers), to analyze whether the process of creating digital stories has a more radical impact on internalizing value than simply being passive consumers. The findings of this study indicate that digital storytelling not only enhances students' engagement and understanding of religious values, but also contributes to the development of positive moral behaviors through contextual and technology-based learning approaches. Future research is recommended to employ longitudinal and mixed-method approaches as well as explore participatory digital storytelling models involving students as active content creators in order to examine the long-term effectiveness and broader impact of religious character internalization in different educational contexts.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research employed a qualitative case study approach focused only on Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Hidayatus Shibyan Talun Cirebon, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other madrasah or educational institutions with different socio-cultural and technological contexts. Second, the participants involved in this study were limited to several teachers, school stakeholders, and students, without involving parents or broader community perspectives that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the internalization of religious character values through digital storytelling. Third, this study mainly explored the implementation process and students' responses qualitatively, without quantitatively measuring the long-term effectiveness of digital storytelling on students' character development and behavioral transformation. In addition, the research was conducted within a limited period of time, so it could not fully examine the sustainability and consistency of students' religious character formation over time. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve larger samples, apply mixed-method or longitudinal approaches, and explore participatory digital storytelling models in various educational settings to obtain broader and more comprehensive findings.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

ENK conceptualized the study, conducted the field research, collected and analyzed the data, and prepared the original draft of the manuscript. AAN contributed to the research design, provided theoretical and methodological guidance, supervised the overall research process, and critically

reviewed and revised the manuscript to improve its academic quality and clarity. Both authors read, approved, and agreed to the final version of the manuscript prior to publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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