Finding the Spirit in Learning: An Effective Approach in Islamic Education

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Learning; Approach; Effective; Islamic Education *Article history:* Received 2024-08-14 Revised 2025-01-12 Accepted 2025-06-01	Islamic education is intended not only as a means of knowledge transmission but also as a foundation for nurturing character and spiritual awareness. However, the learning process in many institutions has increasingly shifted toward cognitive and academic focus, often marginalizing its spiritual essence or *ruh*. This study aims to identify and analyze learning approaches that address this gap by revitalizing the spiritual core of Islamic education. Using a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed national and international publications from the past decade, this research highlights five key approaches: holistic-integrative, exemplary (*uswah hasanah*), contemplative-reflective, contextual value-based, and digital storytelling. These approaches were selected based on clear pedagogical indicators and consistent references across various studies. They align with the foundational objectives of Islamic education as formulated by scholars such as Al-Attas and Al-Ghazali. This study contributes to the discourse on Islamic pedagogy by recommending the structured integration of these approaches into curriculum design, instructional strategies, and professional teacher development programs.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic education's primary mission is to shape a complete human being (insan kamil) who not only possesses knowledge but also possesses a noble personality, noble morals, and a high spiritual awareness. This differs fundamentally from the goals of secular education, which emphasizes cognitive and professional aspects. In Islam, education is a comprehensive process encompassing spiritual, physical, intellectual, and social aspects. As explained by Al-Attas, the goal of Islamic education is to instill morality in humans through the internalization of knowledge derived from revelation and reason.[1] Education that does not present a spiritual dimension in its process risks losing its essential orientation as a means of getting closer to Allah SWT, thus making the learning process dry of values and meaning.

The phenomenon of modern education demonstrates a strong tendency toward rationalization and academicization of the learning process. Curricula are often oriented toward learning achievement standards (CP), learning outcomes (LO), and academic performance indicators, while neglecting the

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[1] S. M. N Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1980).

most profound aspects of education itself: the formation of students' souls and characters[2]. In the context of Islamic education, learning that lacks the spirit will produce people who are dry in terms of values, and merely intellectually intelligent without moral and spiritual wisdom[3]. The spirit in learning, in a meaningful sense, can be understood as the spiritual dimension, sincerity, meaningfulness, and transcendental awareness that accompanies the teaching and learning process.

The Quran, in Surah Al-Isra', verse 85, states, "They ask you about the spirit. Say: 'The spirit is of the affair of my Lord, and you have not been given knowledge of it but a little.'" This verse serves as a spiritual foundation that the spirit is not a physical or material entity, but rather a metaphysical force that underlies human life and consciousness. In the context of education, the spirit of learning means the presence of awareness among teachers and students to use knowledge as a path to drawing closer to God, not merely a means to attain a degree or job. Therefore, learning that is solely oriented towards academic achievement tends to be value-lacking and loses its essence of meaning.

The spirit in learning also encompasses the importance of intentional orientation (niyyah), sincerity in teaching and learning, and exemplary values internalized by educators. Teachers in the Islamic tradition are not only instructors (mu'allim), but also moral educators (murabbi), spiritual guides (mursyid), and role models (uswah hasanah). As emphasized in QS. Al-Ahzab: 21, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the best role model in all aspects of life, including education. Therefore, bringing the spirit into learning truly means bringing prophetic values, compassion, patience, and wisdom into every educational interaction between teacher and student.

Several Islamic educational approaches offer learning models that emphasize the presence of the spirit, including the holistic-integrative approach, the exemplary approach (uswah), the contemplative approach, and the value-based contextual approach.[4] These approaches integrate cognitive dimensions with affective and spiritual dimensions in a balanced way, so that the learning process not only makes students into human beings who know (knowing), but also wise (being) and responsible (doing). In the Islamic tradition, education aims not only to transfer knowledge, but also to shape the character and spirituality of students. The concept of the soul in learning refers to the spiritual dimension that animates the teaching and learning process, making it more than just a cognitive activity. Al-Attas emphasized that the goal of Islamic education is to produce civilized individuals through the process of internalizing knowledge derived from revelation and reason.[5] This is in line with Al-Ghazali's view which emphasizes the importance of education in forming morals and getting closer to Allah.[6]

The holistic approach to Islamic education integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects with spiritual values. Retno stated that this approach aims to develop balanced and harmonious individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess spiritual depth. [7]Research by Saepudin shows that a holistic approach can improve the overall quality of education and support student character development. Integrating Islamic values into learning methods is a crucial strategy for revitalizing the spirit of learning.[8] Juwairiyah and Fanani emphasize that learning methods that emphasize reflection, experience, and internalization of Islamic values are effective in shaping students' character and spirituality. This approach also supports the development of critical thinking skills and creativity, which are essential in facing the challenges of the modern era.[9]

The development of digital technology presents both opportunities and challenges for Islamic education. Azizatus Shofiyyah examines the use of digital storytelling as an innovative approach to

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[2] E Mulyasa, *Manajemen Pendidikan Karakter* (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2018).

[3] Jalaluddin, *Psikologi Agama* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2012).

[4] I Arifin, *Filsafat Pendidikan Islam: Telaah Terhadap Asas Dan Konsep Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2009).

[5] Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*.

[6] M Harahap, "Islamic Education as the Spiritual and Moral Foundation for the Younger Generation," *International Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 2 (2023): 123–35.

[7] M Retno, I., Syifa, S., Zidny, H., Syahidin, S., & Parhan, "Harmonisasi Pendidikan Ruh, Akal, Dan Badan Dalam Filsafat Pendidikan Islam," *Al-Thariqah: Jurnal Ilmiah Studi Islam* 10, no. 1 (2025): 1–15.

[8] A Saepudin, "Holistic Islamic Education: Assessing the Impact of Integrative Curricula on Moral and Spiritual Development in Secondary Schools," *International Journal of Science and Society* 6, no. 1 (2024): 1072–83.

[9] Z Juwairiyah, & Fanani, "Integration of Islamic Values in Learning Methods: Building Character and Spirituality in the Digital Era," *AL-WIJDÁN: Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 10, no. 1 (2025): 45–60.

Islamic education. [10] Their research findings suggest that digital narratives can increase student engagement and deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings. However, technology integration must be carried out carefully to ensure Islamic values are maintained. Integrating local wisdom into Islamic education can enrich students' learning experiences. [11] Sukeriyadi and Duraesa stated that this approach helps students understand and appreciate Islamic values within the local cultural context. It also strengthens religious identity and increases the relevance of learning to everyday life. [12]

In line with the increasingly complex challenges of the times, Islamic education needs to reaffirm the urgency of bringing the spirit into every learning activity. The era of digitalization, the commercialization of education, and the disruption of values due to globalization pose unique challenges in maintaining the purity of Islamic education. Therefore, this literature review aims to examine and formulate effective approaches in Islamic education that can revitalize the spirit of learning. It is hoped that through this study, Islamic education will not be merely a teaching system, but rather a process of forming meaningful human beings who live with spiritual values and awareness. The novelty of this study is the systematic mapping of five approaches to holistic-integrative learning, exemplary, reflective contemplative, value-based contextual, and digital storytelling, which have not been comprehensively studied in the literature, thus providing a new contribution to the development of contemporary Islamic educational theory and practice.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a literature review method (library research), which is a systematic approach used to explore and analyze knowledge that is available in the form of written documents, both conceptual and theoretical, as well as the results of previous research. [13] According to Zed, literature review is an effective way to collect relevant ideas, theories and findings to build strong and accountable scientific arguments. [14] This method was chosen because it is in accordance with the purpose of the article, namely to identify and elaborate on effective learning approaches in bringing the spirit of Islamic education to life based on valid scientific sources.

In its implementation, the author applies the principles of systematic literature review as explained by Snyder (2019), by combining an exploratory approach and critical synthesis. [15] The data search process was conducted through scientific search engines such as Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Garuda Ristekbrin. The selected sources consisted of accredited national journals (SINTA) and reputable international journals (Scopus and DOAJ). The inclusion criteria were set out in detail, namely: (1) articles published between 2013 and 2025, (2) relevant to Islamic education issues, spiritual values in learning, pedagogical approaches, or value integration, and (3) articles that have undergone a peer-reviewed process and written by academics or education practitioners.

The source selection procedure was carried out in several stages. The first stage was initial identification using relevant keywords, followed by screening based on titles and abstracts. In the next stage, a full content review was conducted to ensure topic suitability and scientific quality. From the selection results, 35 primary articles were obtained, which were used as analysis material. In addition, the author also referred to authoritative literature such as the works of Al-Attas (1980), Arifin (2009), and Jalaluddin (2012) to strengthen the conceptual framework.

The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. This technique enabled the author to identify, group, and synthesize key themes emerging from various sources. The three main themes focused on in this analysis were: (1) the concept of the soul in Islamic learning, (2) learning approaches

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[10] Rabiatul Osman and Rosnidar Ab. Rahman, "Spiritual Intelligence and Its Impact on Educational Leadership in Islamic Schools," *Journal of Educational Administration* 61, no. 2 (2023): 231–48.

[11] M. I Azizatus Shofiyyah, N., Ulum, M., & Zaelani, "Investigating Transformative Approaches in Islamic Education through Digital Stories to Shape the Future of Learning," *International Journal of Social Science* 1, no. 1 (2025): 26–39.

[12] M. A Sukeriyadi, M., & Duraesa, "Analisis Hasil Penelitian Pendidikan Islam Dengan Pendekatan Kearifan Lokal Dalam Perspektif Budaya," *Jurnal Kolaboratif Sains* 6, no. 12 (2023): 1874–85.

[13] D Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2017).

[14] M Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2008).

[15] H Snyder, "Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines," *Journal of Business Research* 104 (2019): 333–339.

that contain spiritual values and are effective in shaping student character, and (3) the challenges of implementing spiritual values in contemporary educational contexts.

To maintain validity and transparency, the analysis process was carried out iteratively, noting key points and comparing sources. Although the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach was not fully utilized, its structure and filtering logic were adapted to ensure traceability and consistency of the review process. Through this approach, the authors hope the study's findings can provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of spiritually and contextually meaningful Islamic learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
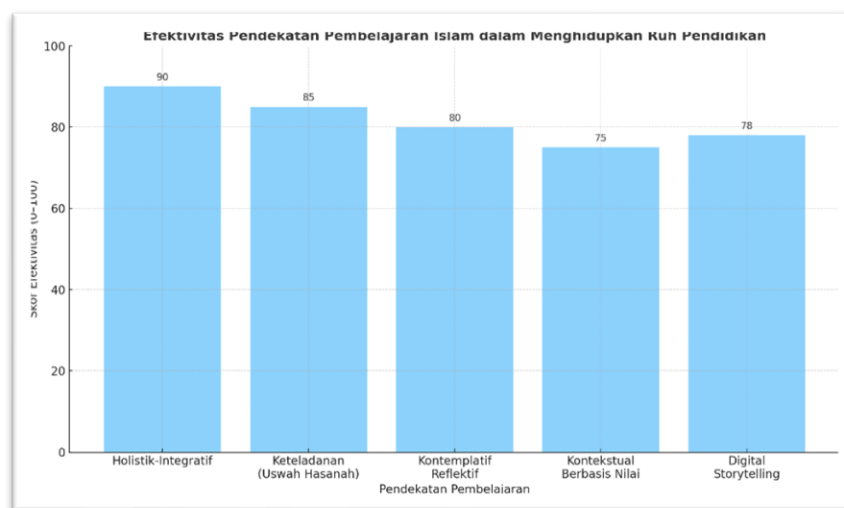
Figure 1. Effectiveness of the Islamic Learning Approach in Bringing the Spirit of Education to Life

Based on the bar graph visualization above, which presents a comparative overview of the effectiveness of five learning approaches in the context of Islamic education, each approach is analyzed based on its contribution to enlivening the spirit or spiritual dimension of learning, which is the core of true Islamic education. The effectiveness score is determined based on a synthesis of findings from various academic literature, field studies, and contemporary educational practices.[16] The light blue color in the graph depicts the nuances of spirituality, serenity, and inner awareness that are the goals of each learning approach.

The Holistic-Integrative Approach ranked highest with an effectiveness score of 90. This is not surprising, as it unites the cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions into a unified whole. Teachers not only deliver material but also guide the hearts and characters of students. In Islamic education, this aligns with the concept of ta'dib (instilling manners) proposed by Al-Attas (1980), which views education as a process of purification and holistic development of the soul.

Furthermore, the Exemplary Approach (Uswah Hasanah) received a score of 85, confirming that teachers who exemplify behavior and values have a significant impact on shaping students' character. Exemplary behavior does not require complex theory—the presence of an honest, patient, and humble teacher provides the most powerful and unforgettable lesson. Verse 21 of the Quran, Al-Ahzab, makes the Prophet Muhammad the primary model for exemplary education.

The Contemplative-Reflective Approach ranked third with a score of 80. While not as popular as lectures or active discussions, this approach has the advantage of activating students' inner dimensions through contemplation (tafakkur), internal dialogue, and the appreciation of meaning. When students are invited to reflect on the meaning of life, the purpose of learning, and the nature of knowledge, they not only learn but also experience a transformation of consciousness.

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[16] N. Noddings, *Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education* (Teachers College Press, 2002).

In fourth place is the Values-Based Contextual Approach with a score of 75. This approach connects learning materials to real life and Islamic teachings. This is crucial so students feel that the knowledge they are learning is not just for exams, but for life. When Islamic values are linked to everyday events, students more easily internalize the meaning and apply them.

Finally, the Digital Storytelling Approach scored 78, outperforming the contextual approach due to its ability to reach the digital generation. Although technology-based, this approach is able to convey Islamic values in a creative, emotional, and accessible way. Visual stories, Islamic animations, or heartfelt digital narratives have been proven to evoke emotions and create a strong emotional bond between students and the educational message being conveyed.[17]

Overall, this graph does not only convey numbers, but represents a map of the Islamic learning approaches that have the most impact in bringing the spirit of education to life.[18] This is a strategic reference for teachers, educators, and Islamic educational institutions to design learning that is not only academically effective, but also spiritually meaningful and personally transformative.[19]

Discussion

Learning in Islamic education is basically not only an activity of transferring knowledge, but also a process of purifying the soul and forming character.[20] As explained by Al-Attas, the primary goal of Islamic education is to develop civilized human beings (insan adabi) through the internalization of knowledge derived from revelation and reason. This concept requires every learning process to contain a spiritual or spiritual dimension capable of igniting awareness, constructing meaning, and shaping character.[21] The findings of this study strengthen this theory by identifying a number of approaches that have proven effective in bringing the spirit of learning to life in the classroom.[22]

Holistic-Integrative Approach: Implementation of the Concept of Insan Kamil

In the theoretical framework of Islamic education, humans are seen as complete beings consisting of body, mind and spirit.[23] The holistic-integrative approach that occupies the highest effectiveness score in the results graph, is a direct reflection of this concept.[24] This approach emphasizes not only academic achievement (cognitive aspects), but also the spiritual and emotional development of students. In line with Saepudin[25] and Retno[26], The implementation of this model in Islamic schools has shown success in forming students who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also polite, empathetic, and spiritually responsible.[27]

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[17] Azizatus Shofiyyah, N., Ulum, M., & Zaelani, "Investigating Transformative Approaches in Islamic Education through Digital Stories to Shape the Future of Learning."

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[19] Donald A. Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action.* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

[20] Sarfaroz Niyozov and Nadeem Memon, "Islamic Education and Islamization: Evolution of Themes, Continuities and New Directions," *Comparative Education Review* 55, no. 3 (2011): 389–411.

[21] Rosnani Hashim, "Rethinking Islamic Education in Facing the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 31, no. 3 (2014): 1–20.

[22] Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*.

[23] Achmad Ushuluddin et al, "Religion and Spirituality in Society Human Intelligence in Islam" 11, no. 2 (n.d.).

[24] M. Friedman, *The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits* (New York Times Magazine, 1970).

[25] Saepudin, "Holistic Islamic Education: Assessing the Impact of Integrative Curricula on Moral and Spiritual Development in Secondary Schools."

[26] Retno, I., Syifa, S., Zidny, H., Syahidin, S., & Parhan, "Harmonisasi Pendidikan Ruh, Akal, Dan Badan Dalam Filsafat Pendidikan Islam."

[27] S Oleiro Ara'ujo et al., "Machine Learning Applications in Agriculture: Current Trends, Challenges, and Future Perspectives," *Agronomy* 12 (2023): 2976.

Exemplary Approach (Uswah Hasanah): Practical Manifestation of the Prophet Muhammad's Exemplary Theory

Exemplary behavior is a key principle in Islamic education. In QS. Al-Ahzab: 21, it is emphasized that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the best role model for mankind.[28] Teachers as central figures in learning have a major role in representing Islamic values through behavior, attitudes and speech.[29] This theory is reinforced by Harahap, who stated that students learn more from what they see and feel than from what they simply hear. Thus, the role model approach is not only effective as a teaching method but also as a living medium for authentic spiritual learning.[30]

Contemplative-Reflective Approach: Actualization of the Concept of Tafakkur and Tazkiyatun *Nafs*

Islamic education always encourages reflection and purification of the soul. Arifin stated that true learning occurs when individuals deeply connect with the meaning of knowledge.[31] The contemplative approach that provides space for students to reflect, ask questions, and dialogue with themselves is an actual practice of the concept of tafakkur and tazkiyatun *nafs*.[32] This is important in the current context, where students often experience a lack of meaning due to learning that is too mechanistic and rushed.[33]

Value-Based Contextual Approach: Theory of Relevance and Social Transformation

Jalaluddin (2012), Juwairiyah and Fanani (2025) emphasize the importance of the relationship between the knowledge learned and students' real life contexts. [34]In Islamic education, Quranic values are not merely theoretical but must be applicable in everyday life. A contextual approach bridges the gap between text and reality, between heavenly verses and earthly challenges.[35] This is very important to avoid the occurrence of value alienation, which is when students study religion, but do not find its relevance in their lives.[36]

Digital Storytelling: Adapting Islamic Educational Theory to Technology

In the digital age, methods for conveying values must also be adaptive. The use of digital storytelling is a form of adapting Islamic educational theory into a communicative and contextual format for millennials and Gen Z.[37] Azizatus Shofiyyah showed that conveying Islamic narratives through digital media can increase emotional participation and strengthen a deeper understanding of values.[38] This is in line with the principle of da'wah bil hikmah - conveying goodness in a way that is wise, touching the heart, and in accordance with the times.[39]

Integration of Theory and Results: Understanding the Spirit as a Binding Principle

If we relate it back to the verses of the Qur'an in QS. Al-Isra: 85, the spirit is a metaphysical force that gives life. In the context of education, the spirit is the bond between knowledge, values

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[28] J Jiang et al., "Scientometric Insights into Urban Sustainability: Exploring the Vulnerability-Adaptation-Settlements Nexus for Climate Resilience," *Frontiers in Environmental Science* 13 (2025).

[29] A Mkumbukiy et al., "Agrifood Systems' Resilience for Sustainable Food Security amid Geopolitical Tensions: A Systematic Literature Review," *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 9 (2025): 1546851.

[30] Harahap, "*Islamic Education as the Spiritual and Moral Foundation for the Younger Generation*."

[31] Arifin, *Filsafat Pendidikan Islam: Telaah Terhadap Asas Dan Konsep Pendidikan Islam*.

[32] K Liakos et al., "*Machine Learning in Agriculture: A Review," Sensors*, 2018.

[33] J Mark Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education," *Comparative Education* 40, no. 4 (2004): 517–29.

[34] Juwairiyah, & Fanani, "*Integration of Islamic Values in Learning Methods: Building Character and Spirituality in the Digital Era.*"

[35] Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, "*The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization," Islamic Studies* 56, no. 1 (2017): 45–70.

[36] S Jamil, "Analisis Relevansi Pendidikan Nasional Dan Pendidikan Islam," *Jurnal Wistara* 4, no. 2 (2023): 111–20.

[37] Achmad Subagyo and Miftahul Huda, "*Digital Technology for Islamic Education: Opportunities and Challenges," International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)* 15, no. 3 (2020): 234–44,.

[38] Abdullah Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education," *Religious Education* 113, no. 3 (2018): 304–15.

[39] Azizatus Shofiyyah, N., Ulum, M., & Zaelan*i, "Investigating Transformative Approaches in Islamic Education through Digital Stories to Shape the Future of Learning.*"

and action.[40] The five approaches analyzed in this study are not merely technical strategies, but concrete expressions of major theories in Islamic education. The presence of the spirit makes learning more than just an instructional process it becomes an existential experience, a self-awareness, and a spiritual path toward closeness to the Creator.[41]

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the spirit of learning is an essential dimension that distinguishes Islamic education from other educational systems. It encompasses more than just spirituality, encompassing intention, meaning, values, and transcendental goals in the teaching and learning process. The findings reveal five effective learning approaches in bringing the spirit of Islamic education to life, aligning with core values and responding to the challenges of modern education. The study's primary contribution is a systematic mapping of these approaches, while emphasizing the importance of comprehensively integrating the spiritual dimension into the curriculum and practices of Islamic education. The implications of these findings require Islamic educators and educational institutions to systematically integrate the spiritual dimension into their curricula, teacher training, and teaching practices to produce students who are fully knowledgeable, morally upright, and devout.

However, this study is limited to literature and conceptual analysis, necessitating further empirical research evaluating the effectiveness of implementing the five approaches in different contexts and with diverse student populations. Further research is also recommended to develop holistic learning models that optimally integrate technology without sacrificing the spiritual dimension. In this way, Islamic education can continue to adapt and make a significant contribution to shaping the character of a competitive and spiritually-minded future generation.

The main findings of this study confirm that revitalizing the spirit in learning can only be realized through the integration of five complementary strategic approaches: holistic-integrative, exemplary, reflective-contemplative, value-based contextual, and digital storytelling. These five approaches have proven effective in maintaining a balance between the cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions, while also offering a new conceptual framework for developing Islamic educational curricula and practices relevant to the challenges of the digital era.

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