

Islamic Parenting of Early Childhood in the Screen Age: Developing Holistic Personality

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Abstract. This study examines the challenges of implementing Islamic parenting in the digital era, particularly during early childhood (0–6 years), a critical period for moral and personality development. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, data were collected through structured online questionnaires administered to 52 parents across five regions in West Java: Tasikmalaya, Sukabumi, Cirebon, Subang, and Bandung Regency. The findings indicated that over 80% of children were introduced to smartphones before age five, with entertainment content accounting for approximately 70% of their digital consumption. Furthermore, 30.8% of children exhibited difficulty detaching from their devices, while 25% of parents reported a scarcity of engaging Islamic content tailored for early childhood. These results suggest that digital media functions as an active developmental environment shaping children's interaction patterns and behaviors. The primary challenge of Islamic parenting, therefore, extends beyond regulating screen time to preserving the family's role as the central agent of moral meaning-making. Without active parental mediation, children tend to internalize values from digital content uncritically. Grounded in social learning and developmental ecology perspectives, this study highlights that effective Islamic parenting requires a shift from restrictive practices to an engagement-based approach combining co-use, guided interaction, and role modeling. It concludes that fostering consistent moral development in the digital age necessitates both active parental involvement and cross-institutional collaboration among families, schools, and communities.

Keywords: *Islamic Parenting, Digital Media, Early Childhood, Personality Development, Digital Environment, Moral Education*

Abbreviations: -

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies have become part of everyday childhood. Smartphones, internet access, and digital media are now widely present in Indonesian households, exposing children to digital environments from a very early age. Statistics Indonesia (BPS) reported that 39.71% of young children had used a mobile phone and 35.57% had accessed the internet. Digital exposure begins even before infancy ends. In 2024, 5.88% of children younger than one year had already used a mobile phone and 4.33% had accessed the internet. The proportion increases steadily with age. Among children aged one to four years, 37.02% had used a mobile phone and 33.80% had accessed the internet. The figures rise to 58.25% and 51.19%, respectively, among children aged five to six years [1]. These changes suggest that digital experiences are no longer peripheral to childhood but have become part of children's daily developmental environment.

Early childhood is widely recognised as the golden age because cognitive, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual capacities develop rapidly during this period. Personality begins to take shape through continuous interaction with parents and the surrounding environment. At the same time, digital media introduces children to new sources of information, behaviour, and values. Previous studies have linked uncontrolled digital exposure to weaker self-regulation, poorer prosocial behaviour, and difficulties in internalising moral values [2]. Excessive screen use has also been associated with impaired executive functioning, attention problems, emotional dysregulation, and behavioural difficulties among young children [3], [4], [5]. In contrast, parental supervision, appropriate content selection, and constructive communication reduce many of these risks [6], [7]. These findings imply that the developmental consequences of digital technology depend less on the technology itself than on the way children are guided in using it.

Within Islamic educational philosophy, the family is regarded as the first and most influential educational institution, responsible for nurturing children's intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual development [8]. Islamic parenting is built upon exemplary conduct (*qudwah hasanah*), moral guidance (*al-maw'izah*),

habituation (al-'adah), compassionate supervision (al-mulahadzah), and proportionate discipline [9], [10], [11]. These principles aim to cultivate character while preparing children to respond to social change without losing their moral and religious foundations. Digital transformation therefore should not be understood as a challenge to Islamic education alone, but also as a context in which Islamic parenting must be reinterpreted and practised in new ways [12], [13].

Existing research consistently recognises the central role of families in children's personality development [8], [14], [15], [16], and highlights the importance of the home environment in shaping children's character [17], [18], [19]. More recent studies have begun to connect Islamic parenting with children's digital lives. Integrating Islamic values into digital parenting practices has been associated with stronger self-regulation, greater moral resilience, and healthier personality development [20], [21]. Digital parenting programmes grounded in Islamic values have also been reported to improve parents' confidence in managing children's digital media use [22], [23]. Despite these advances, the literature largely treats Islamic parenting as either a traditional parenting practice or a strategy for regulating screen use. Few studies have examined Islamic parenting as an adaptive conceptual framework capable of responding to digital transformation through the lens of Islamic educational philosophy. As a result, the relationship between Islamic parenting principles, parental digital mediation, and children's holistic personality development remains insufficiently explained [24], [25].

This study addresses that gap by examining how Islamic parenting is implemented to foster the holistic personality development of children during the golden age from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy. Rather than describing parenting practices alone, the study proposes a reconceptualisation of Islamic parenting that integrates Islamic educational values with the realities of children's digital lives. The findings are expected to extend the theoretical discussion on Islamic education while providing practical guidance for parents, educators, and policymakers seeking to support children's moral, spiritual, emotional, and social development in an increasingly digital society.

METHODS

Study area

The study was conducted across several regions of West Java Province, Indonesia, including Bandung City, Bandung Regency, Cirebon, Sukabumi, Subang, and Tasikmalaya (Figure 1). These locations were selected to represent urban and semi-urban communities where families with young children are increasingly exposed to digital technologies. Data were collected through an online survey using Google Forms, enabling efficient participation from respondents across different geographical areas without spatial constraints.

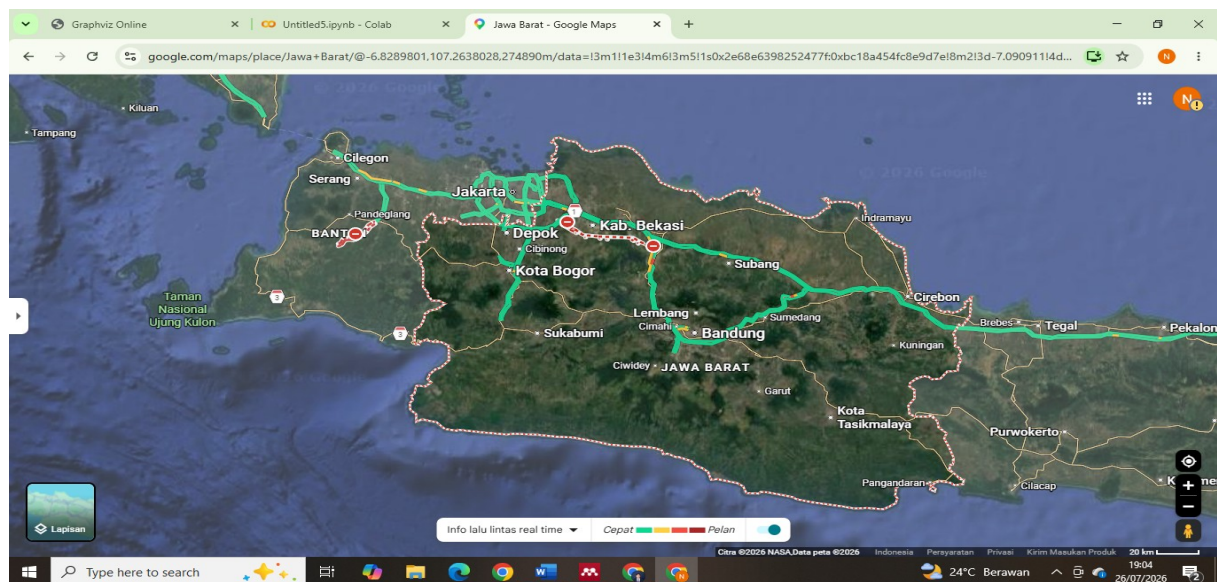


Figure 1. Distribution of study locations in West Java Province, Indonesia.

Procedures

Research Design and Participants

A quantitative approach employing a descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted. This design was considered appropriate for describing parental characteristics, digital parenting practices, and the implementation of Islamic parenting as they naturally occurred, without manipulating any research variables.

Descriptive surveys are widely used to provide an empirical overview of social phenomena based on respondents' experiences and perceptions.

Participants consisted of 52 parents, recruited through purposive sampling. This sampling strategy ensured that respondents met the criteria relevant to the objectives of the study: (1) having at least one child aged 0–5 years; (2) the child had been exposed to or used digital devices, particularly smartphones; and (3) parents reported incorporating Islamic values into their everyday parenting practices. Selecting participants with these characteristics enabled the study to obtain information directly related to Islamic parenting in the context of early childhood digital exposure.

Instrument Development and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire developed through Google Forms. The instrument consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

The closed-ended items gathered information on respondents' demographic characteristics, children's digital device ownership and use, age at first exposure to digital devices, reasons for providing digital devices, screen time, parental regulation of device use, types of digital content accessed, parental mediation practices, implementation of Islamic values in children's digital activities, and challenges encountered in applying Islamic parenting in the digital era.

Open-ended questions were included to allow respondents to elaborate on their experiences and provide additional explanations that enriched the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with several parents to assess item clarity, readability, and content relevance. Feedback obtained during the pilot phase was used to refine the wording of several items before the final survey was distributed.

The final questionnaire was disseminated via WhatsApp to parents affiliated with parenting communities, playgroups (Kelompok Bermain), early childhood education centers (PAUD), and kindergartens (TK) across the study area.

Participation was voluntary. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents received information regarding the study objectives and provided informed consent electronically. Respondent anonymity and data confidentiality were maintained throughout the study, and all information was used exclusively for research purposes. Data collection was conducted once using a cross-sectional survey approach.

Data analysis

Responses from the closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize respondent characteristics and patterns of digital technology use within Islamic parenting practices. These descriptive measures were selected to provide a clear overview of the distribution of responses and facilitate interpretation of the observed patterns.

Responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively as supplementary evidence to provide contextual explanations for the quantitative findings. These responses were not subjected to formal inferential analysis but were used to enrich the discussion and improve the interpretation of the survey results.

The findings are presented in the form of tables, figures, and narrative descriptions to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of Islamic parenting in fostering holistic personality development among young children in the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Respondents and Early Childhood Digital Technology Use

The study involved 52 parents of young children from West Java Province, Indonesia. Most respondents were 25–35 years old (51.9%), and the majority were mothers, indicating that decisions regarding childrearing and children's digital technology use remain predominantly made by mothers. In terms of occupation, 78.8% of respondents were homemakers, while the remainder were self-employed (7.7%), small business owners (5.8%), and civil servants (5.8%).

The findings indicate that smartphones were the most commonly used digital devices among young children. A total of 61.5% of respondents reported that their children used smartphones more frequently than any other digital device, whereas 40.4% indicated that television remained a commonly used medium. In contrast, the use of tablets and laptops was minimal, accounting for only 1.9% of responses.

Exposure to digital devices began at a relatively early age. Most parents introduced smartphones when their children were 3–4 years old (34.6%). Nevertheless, nearly half of the respondents (48.1%) reported introducing digital devices before their children reached the age of three. These findings suggest that digital

technology has become an integral part of children's developmental environment from the earliest stages of life.

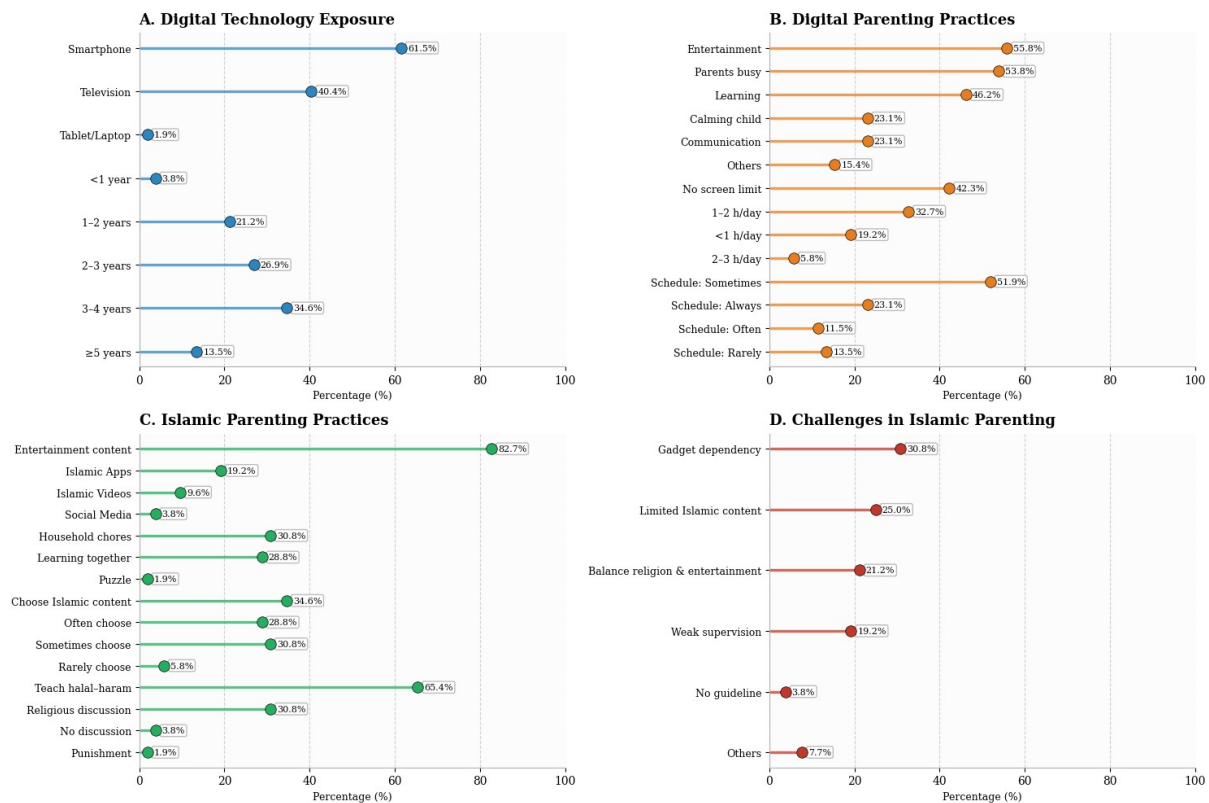


Figure 2. Overview of Digital Technology Use and Islamic Parenting Practices among Families with Young Children.

Patterns of Digital Media Use among Early Childhood Children

The findings indicate that smartphones were used by young children primarily for entertainment rather than educational purposes. More than half of the respondents (55.8%) reported providing digital devices mainly for entertainment, while 53.8% allowed their children to use smartphones to keep them occupied while parents were engaged in household chores or other activities. In comparison, 46.2% of parents reported using smartphones as learning tools, whereas 23.1% used them to calm children when they became fussy or as a means of communication.

Although digital devices have become part of children's daily routines, their use was not consistently regulated. Approximately 42.3% of parents reported that they did not impose any specific time limits on smartphone use. Meanwhile, 32.7% restricted screen time to 1–2 hours per day, whereas the remaining respondents reported either shorter or longer periods of use.

Parental monitoring also varied considerably. More than half of the respondents (51.9%) indicated that they only occasionally established schedules or rules governing children's digital device use. By contrast, 23.1% consistently enforced such rules, while the remainder reported doing so irregularly. These findings suggest that digital media use within families is generally managed through flexible arrangements that depend largely on each household's circumstances rather than through consistent and structured regulation.

Islamic Parenting Practices in the Digital Environment

Beyond regulating children's digital device usage, this study also examined how parents integrate Islamic values into digital parenting practices. A total of 34.6% of respondents reported that they consistently selected Islamic content for their children, while 30.8% did so occasionally and 28.8% did so relatively frequently. Only a small proportion of respondents (5.8%) rarely considered the selection of digital content aligned with Islamic values.

The reinforcement of religious values was predominantly implemented through educational approaches. Approximately 65.4% of parents introduced the concepts of *halal* and *haram* when their children engaged with digital media, while 30.8% conveyed these values through discussions and religious storytelling. A punitive approach was rarely adopted, with only 1.9% of respondents reporting the use of punishment when children violated digital device usage rules.

Meanwhile, entertainment content remained the most frequently accessed type of digital content among children (82.7%). In contrast, the use of Islamic educational applications (19.2%) and Islamic videos (9.6%)

remained relatively limited. This finding indicates that Islamic parenting practices are implemented within a digital environment where entertainment-oriented content remains dominant across digital platforms.

Table 1. Summary of Major Findings on Early Childhood Digital Parenting

Aspect	Dominant Findings
Respondents	Mothers aged 25–35 years (51.9%)
Occupation	Homemakers (78.8%)
Primary device	Smartphone (61.5%)
Initial exposure	3–4 years (34.6%)
Main purpose	Entertainment (55.8%)
Time regulation	No fixed limit (42.3%)
Most accessed content	Entertainment (82.7%)
Islamic parenting practice	Teaching halal–haram (65.4%)
Main challenge	Children's dependence on gadgets (30.8%)

Challenges in Implementing Islamic Parenting

Parents reported several challenges in implementing Islamic parenting in the digital environment. The most frequently reported challenge was the difficulty of reducing children's gadget use, as indicated by 30.8% of respondents. In addition, 25.0% of parents reported that age-appropriate Islamic content for children was still limited. A total of 21.2% of respondents experienced difficulties in balancing children's entertainment needs with the introduction of religious values. Other challenges included limited supervision of children's digital device use (19.2%) and the lack of practical Islamic-based digital parenting guidelines (3.8%).

The results also show that digital technology has become part of children's daily activities. Smartphones were the most commonly used devices and were generally introduced during the preschool period. Parents reported efforts to incorporate Islamic values through content selection and moral guidance during digital media use. However, regulating children's screen time and monitoring access to digital content remained among the challenges experienced by parents in their daily parenting practices.

Discussion

The Concept of Islamic Parenting in Developing Children's Holistic Personality During the Golden Age

The findings indicate that the family remains the primary institution in the process of internalizing Islamic values during the golden age period. The introduction of the concepts of *halal* and *haram*, as well as the habit of selecting content aligned with Islamic teachings, suggests that character education in early childhood is developed more through experiences embedded in everyday life rather than through formal learning processes. At this developmental stage, consistent interactions between parents and children serve as the foundation for shaping ways of thinking, attitudes, and behaviors that influence personality development in later stages of life.

These findings support the view that Islamic parenting is not limited to fulfilling children's physical needs but also represents a process of *tarbiyah* that places faith (*iman*), monotheism (*tauhid*), and moral development (*akhlak*) as fundamental elements of parenting [26], [27]. From this perspective, personality development occurs through the interaction between children's innate potential and an environment that consistently introduces values, norms, and exemplary behaviors [28]. Therefore, the family becomes the first environment that shapes how children understand themselves, establish relationships with others, and recognize religious values as guidance for their behavior [14], [15].

This process occurs primarily through habituation rather than merely through verbal instruction. Young children tend to learn by observing and imitating the behaviors of those closest to them. Parents' examples in practicing religious activities, communicating with others, and dealing with everyday situations provide concrete experiences that are more easily internalized than verbal explanations alone [29]. The habituation of religious practices, such as performing prayers, reading the Qur'an, reciting supplications, and introducing the concepts of *halal* and *haram* from an early age, represents a gradual and repetitive process of character formation [30], [31].

This role has become increasingly important in the digital era, as children begin to obtain social experiences from various sources beyond the family environment. Digitalization does not diminish the family's role as the primary educational environment; rather, it transforms the way values are transmitted. Parents are no longer expected to function solely as rule enforcers but also as guides who help children interpret digital experiences through the perspective of Islamic values. In this context, Islamic parenting is not only concerned with controlling children's digital media use but also with the family's ability to create a learning environment that remains consistent with Islamic principles. Thus, the quality of parent–child relationships continues to serve as the fundamental basis for developing a holistic personality, even as children grow within an increasingly complex digital environment [20], [21], [30], [31].

The Impact of Digital Media Use on Early Childhood Personality Development

Digital media has shifted the locus of early childhood socialization by introducing a parallel environment in which behavioral cues, norms, and values are continuously observed and imitated. High dependence on smartphones for entertainment and behavioral regulation signals that digital exposure is no longer peripheral but structurally embedded in children's daily routines. Personality development, as a result, is shaped through dual channels: proximal interaction within the family and mediated interaction within digital spaces.

Early exposure intensifies this effect. Auxier et al. [32] show that most children engage with digital devices before the age of five, a period characterized by heightened plasticity and reliance on observational learning. Behavioral scripts encountered in digital media are therefore not passively consumed but incorporated into emerging cognitive and social schemas. Digital environments operate as informal institutions that transmit norms, often without the filtering mechanisms present in face-to-face socialization.

Variation in developmental outcomes is best explained by differences in use rather than exposure. Evidence indicates that structured and developmentally appropriate content can reinforce cognitive skills and problem-solving capacities [33]. Unregulated exposure, in contrast, correlates with reduced social responsiveness, weaker empathic capacity, and impaired emotional regulation [3], [4]. The mechanism at play is not technological determinism but mediated learning shaped by content quality, frequency, and context of engagement.

Parental mediation emerges as the critical moderating variable. Empirical findings indicate that some parents actively embed Islamic normative frameworks—such as the distinction between halal and haram—into children's digital interactions through content curation and guided interpretation. This practice extends moral socialization into the digital domain and repositions religious education as an interpretive filter rather than a separate sphere of instruction. Islamic values function here as a normative boundary-setting mechanism that structures how children process and evaluate digital content [34].

The central issue in the digital era lies in the transformation of socialization architecture rather than the presence of technology itself. Digital media constitutes an additional layer of normative influence that operates alongside family-based socialization. Effective parenting therefore requires a shift from surveillance to active mediation, where parents translate, contextualize, and selectively reinforce digital experiences. Developmental outcomes depend on the extent to which this mediation aligns digital exposure with coherent value systems. Digital media, under these conditions, becomes neither inherently beneficial nor harmful, but contingent on the institutional capacity of the family to regulate meaning-making processes.

Challenges in Implementing Islamic Parenting in the Digital Era

The expansion of digital technology has not only intensified young children's exposure to devices but has also reshaped the processes through which personality is formed. Earlier, the family functioned as the primary environment shaping children's understanding of values, behaviour, and worldview. That condition has shifted. Development now unfolds within a far more open ecosystem. Before entering formal schooling, children are already exposed to characters, narratives, symbols, and behavioral patterns mediated through digital platforms. The family no longer operates as the sole agent of socialization during the so-called golden age of development.

This transformation carries significant implications for Islamic parenting. Within an Islamic framework, moral formation (akhlak) emerges through iterative processes: role modeling, habituation, and sustained daily interaction. Religious values are not transmitted through abstract instruction but through lived, continuous experience within the family context. When portions of that experience migrate into digital spaces, the internalization of values becomes partially decoupled from parental control. Learning persists, yet its sources diversify. This structural shift differentiates contemporary parenting from that of previous generations.

Empirical findings indicate that most children are introduced to smartphones at an early age, while entertainment content continues to dominate their digital engagement. Digital media therefore functions not merely as a technological tool but as a developmental environment. Repeated exposure to visual, auditory, and behavioral stimuli within this environment contributes to the formation of habits, preferences, and social responses. This interpretation is consistent with the argument that the quality of children's interaction with media exerts a greater influence than the mere presence of digital devices [4], [35], [36].

The central challenge for Islamic parenting, therefore, lies not in regulating screen time per se but in sustaining the family's authority as the primary source of meaning-making. Young children lack the cognitive capacity for critical evaluation; digital experiences are often accepted as inherently valid. Limiting screen time without guiding interpretive understanding risks allowing value formation to be shaped by unfiltered digital exposure, which may not align with Islamic principles.

A reorientation of Islamic parenting practices becomes necessary. Monitoring remains relevant but insufficient. Priority shifts toward active parental engagement during children's interaction with technology.

Guided engagement transforms digital experiences into dialogical spaces rather than passive consumption. Prophetic narratives, educational videos, value-based games, and Qur'anic learning applications function not merely as alternative content but as mediating tools that integrate technological exposure with moral internalization [33].

This shift further underscores that the success of Islamic parenting extends beyond the dyadic relationship between parent and child. Values cultivated within the home require reinforcement from schools and broader social environments to ensure consistency in moral messaging. Collaboration between families and educational institutions becomes increasingly critical, given that children's socialization now occurs across interconnected physical and digital domains [11], [37], [38], [39].

The primary challenge, therefore, is not to shield children from technology but to ensure that the family retains its central role in constructing meaning around every digital experience encountered by the child.

Reconceptualizing Islamic Parenting in the Digital Era: Toward Digitally Mediated Tarbiyah and Value-Synchronized Ecology

Islamic parenting has historically been grounded in the assumption that the family constitutes the primary locus of children's personality formation. Within this framework, the transmission of tawhid, akhlaq, and adab is enacted through sustained parent-child interaction, role modeling, and habituation practices [9], [40]. This formulation implicitly aligns with a bounded and relatively stable social environment in which value transmission is vertically structured and institutionally concentrated within the family.

However, this assumption becomes increasingly untenable in digitally saturated contexts. Drawing on insights from Ecological Systems Theory, children's development must be understood as occurring within dynamically interacting systems. The findings of this study suggest that digital environments are no longer peripheral elements within these systems but have become embedded layers that restructure interaction patterns across micro- and mesosystems.

Early and continuous exposure to smartphones, algorithmically curated content, and interactive media introduces a form of mediated socialization that operates alongside—and at times independently of—direct parental interaction. This process is further reinforced through mechanisms consistent with Social Learning Theory, where observational learning is no longer limited to immediate social actors but extends to digitally mediated figures, narratives, and symbolic representations.

Under these conditions, digital platforms function as distributed moral environments. They do not merely transmit information but actively shape attention, normalize behavioral scripts, and structure meaning-making processes. This reflects a broader process of mediatization, in which social reality is increasingly constructed through and within media logics. Consequently, the family no longer operates as the sole or even dominant site of value formation, but rather as one node within a complex, multi-layered ecology of influence.

Despite this transformation, existing scholarship remains theoretically fragmented. Islamic parenting literature continues to conceptualize technology primarily as an external disruptor requiring supervision [5], [20], [22], [41], [42], while digital parenting studies emphasize strategies of mediation without embedding them in a coherent moral-epistemic framework [31], [35], [43]. The absence of integration between these strands limits their explanatory power in accounting for contemporary developmental realities.

To address this gap, this study proposes a reconceptualization of Islamic parenting through two interrelated theoretical constructs: Digitally Mediated Tarbiyah and Value-Synchronized Ecology (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Reconceptualized Islamic Parenting in the Digital Era

Digitally Mediated Tarbiyah refers to the extension of Islamic educational principles into digitally mediated environments. Rather than positioning technology as an external object of control, this concept frames digital interaction as an integral domain of *tarbiyah*, where value formation occurs through guided engagement, interpretive dialogue, and contextualized moral reasoning. In this view, *tawhid*, *akhlaq*, and *adab* function not only as internalized beliefs but as active frameworks for navigating digital experiences.

Complementing this, Value-Synchronized Ecology conceptualizes children's development as occurring across interconnected environments that must convey coherent moral signals. Families, schools, religious institutions, peer networks, and digital platforms collectively constitute a normative ecosystem. The effectiveness of value internalization depends on the degree of alignment across these domains; fragmentation, by contrast, produces dissonance that weakens moral coherence.

Within this integrated framework, Islamic parenting is redefined along three interrelated dimensions.

The first dimension, spiritual grounding, emphasizes the internalization of *tawhid*, *ibadah*, *akhlaq*, and *adab* as foundational schemas guiding interpretation and behavior across contexts.

The second dimension, active digital mediation, repositions parents as mediators of meaning rather than mere regulators of access. This includes co-engagement, dialogic interaction, critical content selection, and the cultivation of digital literacy as a moral and cognitive competency.

The third dimension, ecosystemic alignment, underscores the necessity of coordination across developmental environments to ensure consistency in value transmission.

This reconceptualization shifts the analytical focus of Islamic parenting. The central challenge is no longer technological exposure per se, but the capacity to structure children's engagement within digitally mediated environments in ways that sustain moral coherence. Parenting thus evolves from a model of control toward one of ecological orchestration.

Theoretically, this study contributes by bridging normative Islamic educational philosophy with contemporary frameworks of mediated socialization. It advances a unified model in which moral development, digital literacy, and spiritual formation are treated as co-constitutive processes. Islamic parenting in the digital era, therefore, should be understood not as a defensive response to technological change, but as an adaptive and integrative project of cultivating morally grounded, digitally competent individuals within an increasingly complex social ecology.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Islamic parenting in the digital era can no longer be understood as a practice centered on controlling technology, but rather as a process of managing children's developmental experiences

within increasingly mediated environments. Early exposure to digital media reconfigures socialization patterns from being family-centered to being distributed across a broader ecology that includes digital platforms. Consequently, the effectiveness of parenting is determined not by the degree of restriction, but by parents' capacity to frame, interpret, and guide children's interactions within digital contexts.

The findings highlight the need to shift from restrictive approaches toward constructive and reflective mediation. The concept of *Digitally Mediated Tarbiyah* positions digital experience as an integral component of the educational process, while *Value-Synchronized Ecology* emphasizes the importance of consistency across developmental contexts. The integration of these concepts expands Islamic parenting from value transmission within the family to the orchestration of values across a wider ecological system.

The primary contribution of this study lies in the development of a conceptual framework that bridges normative Islamic parenting with contemporary dynamics of mediated socialization. This framework suggests that children's personality formation in the digital era emerges from the interaction between spiritual foundations, digital mediation practices, and the alignment of social environments.

The implications extend beyond the family level. Effective parenting requires structural support through collaboration among parents, educational institutions, communities, and the broader digital ecosystem. Future research should empirically examine this model using longitudinal and intervention-based designs to assess its effectiveness in fostering sustained moral, social, and cognitive development in children.

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