



Islamic digital storytelling as a strategy for Islamic education teachers in fostering the religious character of madrasah students

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Abstract

This study analyzes the implementation of Islamic digital storytelling by Islamic Education (PAI) teachers and studies the Islamic values of this medium and their impact on strengthening the religious character of madrasah adolescents in the digital age. The study uses qualitative research with a case study approach involving two PAI teachers and three madrasah students obtained through purposeful sampling. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observation, documentation, and thematic analysis of 6 stages. This analysis uses digital storytelling narrative theory and the theory of religious character of adolescents. The research analysis shows that the implementation of Islamic digital storytelling covers five main aspects, namely the pedagogical artistic Islamic storytelling narrative design creativity, the pedagogical integration of digital technology and education da'wah, the students' emotional and spiritual resonance, the internalization of digital story Islamic values, and the enhancement of adolescents' religious character in the digital world. The digital storytelling medium demonstrates the capacity to develop madrasah students' affective engagement, moral reflection, and spiritual experience. Therefore, Islamic digital storytelling serves as an important innovative teaching approach combining integrated values, technological and spiritual aspects, and Islamic Education.

Keywords: Islamic digital storytelling, Islamic Education teachers, adolescent religiosity, students' character, madrasah education

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the current digital era, the role of religious education continues to be important in the process of character and identity formation of adolescents. With the rapid rise of the digital economy, students of madrasahs have access to and are influenced by digital, interactive, and visual content. Such content shapes students' perceptions of, and the ways in which they engage, the world. Although fundamental, the legacy forms of religious teaching often fail to access the relevant emotional and situational elements of the adolescent experience (Fiqriani et al., 2025). Alongside digital skills, literacy also encompasses how media are used to construct values, meanings, and formations of religious identities (Shomad & Zatadini, 2025; Tobib et

al., 2025; Waroh & Putri, 2025). Consequently, the issue is no longer whether digital media should be integrated into Islamic Education classrooms, but rather how such integration can be pedagogically meaningful so that Islamic Education (PAI) learning remains connected to the everyday experiences of madrasah adolescents.

In this regard, building digital religious narratives opens possibilities for integrating technology with the formation of spirituality. Digital storytelling can function as a pedagogical strategy that combines narrative, personal reflection, and experiential learning in meaningful ways (Lambert, 2013). Previous studies have generally emphasized the contribution of digital storytelling to student engagement, empathy, and reflective participation in faith-based learning contexts (Adedo & Deriwanto, 2024; Ervina et al., 2025). However, these discussions tend to position storytelling primarily as a technological or instructional medium, with limited attention to how religious meanings are negotiated, interpreted, and reconstructed through the storytelling process itself.

Moreover, most existing studies have emerged from non-Islamic educational contexts, leaving the pedagogical use of digital storytelling in madrasah-based PAI learning insufficiently examined. As a result, little is known about how PAI teachers mediate students' digital religious experiences, guide the interpretation of religious narratives, and connect digital practices with the formation of spirituality in classroom settings. The issue, therefore, is not merely the production of digital stories, but the pedagogical process through which religious narratives are constructed, circulated, and critically discussed within contemporary Islamic education.

The available research on digital storytelling within the context of general education does offer some helpful contextual material, however, the research focused on Islamic digital storytelling as a teaching methodology within the context of the madrasah is nearly absent. For example, Aulia and Qalby (2025) documented some of the early success of revitalizing traditional Islamic stories using digital media. But, they did not explore how PAI teachers implement these strategies in their teaching and how Islamic teachings are psychosocially internalized by adolescents. This points to the necessity of moving from conceptual theorizing to empirical research on classroom practices and the consequences for the psychosocial internalization of these teachings.

Furthermore, much existing literature either focuses on the technical component or the cognitive aspects such as the attainment of objectives, or motivation, and tends to neglect adolescents' religiosity as an emotional and spiritual dimension. Spiegler, Pössel, and Schulze (2024) suggest that the religious development of adolescents is not only linked to doctrinal knowledge but is also emotionally experienced and intertwined with the value integration in the modification of daily practices. Within madrasah contexts, this differentiation is imperative. The objective of Islamic Education is not merely to transmit information, but also to foster a religious attitude. Thus, the pertinent question that arises is to what extent, if at all, does Islamic digital storytelling foster a religious attitude as opposed to only increasing engagement?

PAI teachers operate within a dual tension: curricular accountability on one side and the moral–spiritual needs of digitally immersed students on the other. Studies indicate that teachers' digital literacy remains uneven, often constraining innovative pedagogical integration (Suryaningsih & Purnomo, 2023; Wibowo et al., 2025). Designing Islamic narratives in digital formats requires more than technical competence; it demands narrative sensitivity, ethical framing, and facilitation of reflective dialogue. An effective strategy would therefore

encompass not only content production, but also guided discussion, value clarification, and opportunities for students to connect narrative themes with their lived realities.

Against this backdrop, the present study is guided by two research questions: (1) How is Islamic digital storytelling implemented by PAI teachers in madrasah classrooms? and (2) What Islamic values are embedded and internalized through digital storytelling in strengthening adolescents' religious character in the digital era? These questions narrow the inquiry from broad discussions of technology integration to specific pedagogical practices within the madrasah context. By offering empirical and conceptual insights into Islamic digital storytelling as a strategy for religious cultivation, this study seeks to contribute both to the scholarship of religious education and to practical guidance for PAI teachers and madrasah administrators in designing meaningful digital-based Islamic learning. The article proceeds with a review of related literature, followed by methodology, findings, discussion, and concluding implications.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The use of a qualitative case study approach for this research was based on methodological and epistemological reasons (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The focal point of this research concerns the phenomenon of PAI teachers implementing Islamic digital storytelling and the infusing Islamic values into that practice. This is something that cannot be captured by a synonymous phrase and measured with the use of quantifiable metrics. It is something that occurs in the realm of social interactions, social intent, social interpretations, and social culture of the classroom. A case study approach provides the opportunity for a comprehensive understanding of the social, pedagogical, and religious elements in their social and original settings. This provides the opportunity to understand the practice of digital storytelling as something that is contextual and rich in meaning and not as a mere technical practice.

Participant and Research Site

The participants involved PAI educators who employed digital storytelling in their teaching, as well as some madrasah students who participated in these teaching activities. Research participants, in this case, students of madrasah, were selected using purposive sampling, based on a madrasah that used integrated Islamic value-based digital media in teaching PAI. The choice was made with the belief that the madrasah had contextual relevance to answer the two research questions: how PAI teachers implement Islamic digital storytelling strategies, and the Islamic values embedded in the medium to fortify the religious character of the youth in the digital era.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with PAI teachers to explore their pedagogical strategies, motives, and experiences in using Islamic digital storytelling in the classroom. Observation was carried out to directly examine the learning process, interaction patterns, and students' affective responses to the digital stories presented. Meanwhile, documentation in the form of instructional videos, story scripts, and digital materials was gathered to support the field findings and to trace the representation of Islamic values within

the storytelling content. These three data sources complemented one another, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2019). This analysis consists of six systematic stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading and review of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents; (2) generating initial codes to identify patterns or concepts emerging from the data; (3) searching for potential themes related to the implementation of Islamic digital storytelling and the Islamic values embedded within it; (4) reviewing themes to ensure consistency and coherence across data sources; (5) defining and naming themes to produce representative conceptual categories; and (6) producing the report in a thematic interpretation that addresses the research questions.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed source and method triangulation by comparing findings derived from interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was conducted with participating PAI teachers to verify the accuracy of interpretations and to clarify possible misrepresentations, while peer debriefing with colleagues in Islamic education provided additional critical review, particularly regarding thematic coherence and the plausibility of conclusions. Although these procedures do not eliminate interpretive limitations, they help minimize distortion by placing the analysis within a process of dialogic verification and reflexive scrutiny. Ethical principles guided the entire research process: informed consent was obtained from all participants, the identities of teachers and students were anonymized to ensure confidentiality, and all procedures adhered to educational research ethics and institutional regulations within the madrasah context. Beyond formal compliance, ethical responsibility also involved sensitivity to the religious character of the setting, respect for Islamic values upheld by the institution, maintenance of academic integrity, and careful representation of participants' experiences, positioning methodological rigor and moral accountability as interconnected elements of the inquiry.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings of this study were derived from the analysis of in-depth interviews with two PAI teachers (G1 and G2) and three madrasah students (S1, S2, S3), enriched by direct classroom observations of Islamic digital storytelling practices (OBS). The analytical process followed Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic analysis, which involves six stages: familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This approach enabled the researcher to inductively identify patterns of meaning emerging from the experiences of teachers and students, ensuring that each theme reflected the interrelationship among pedagogical strategies, digital media, and the internalization of Islamic values.

In interpreting the data, the researcher drew on narrative and digital storytelling theory as articulated by Lambert (2013), which emphasizes storytelling as an empathetic, reflective, and transformative medium. From this perspective, Islamic digital storytelling is understood

not merely as an instructional media innovation, but as a form of spiritual narrative that conveys moral and religious messages in ways that resonate with adolescents in the digital era. Digital stories function as spaces of inner dialogue where Islamic values are experienced and reflected upon rather than simply memorized. Within this process, the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator of meaning, guiding students to interpret Islamic narratives in relation to their own lived experiences.

Furthermore, the analysis of interview and observational data was informed by the concept of fostering adolescents' religious character (Astuti, 2022; Zakiyah, 2021), which highlights the internalization of spiritual, moral, and social values through meaningful experience. This lens helped to illuminate how students' engagement with Islamic digital storytelling shaped their religious sensitivity and reflective behavioral orientation. Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation by comparing teacher interviews, student interviews, and classroom observations. From this analytical process, five major themes emerged, illustrating the integration of teachers' strategies, digital learning experiences, and the strengthening of madrasah adolescents' religiosity. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Thematic Findings of Islamic Digital Storytelling Implementation

Indicator	Supporting Evidence (Interviews and Observations)	Coded Theme
Planning and strategies of PAI teachers in implementing Islamic digital storytelling	"Before creating the video, I select stories that are close to students' lives, such as the story of Prophet Yusuf about guarding oneself," (G1). "I adjust the storyline to the moral education theme so students can easily understand it," (G2). Observation showed that the teacher presented Islamic story videos accompanied by value reflection and a closing prayer (OBS).	Pedagogical Creativity of PAI Teachers in Designing and Implementing Islamic Storytelling
Utilization of digital media and technological innovation in PAI learning	"I use Canva and CapCut to create short Islamic story videos," (G2). "We once uploaded students' work to the madrasah YouTube channel so it could become digital da'wah," (G1). Observation indicated that the teacher used a projector and digital platforms to display Islamic story videos (OBS).	Integration of Digital Technology in Educational Da'wah
Students' affective and spiritual responses to digital stories	"After watching the story, I feel more motivated to pray on time," (S1). "The story about the Prophet's companions made me realize the importance of patience," (S2). "I became more appreciative of my parents after watching that story," (S3). Observation showed that students appeared reflective and enthusiastic in discussing the moral messages of the stories (OBS).	Emotional Resonance and Students' Spirituality

Indicator	Supporting Evidence (Interviews and Observations)	Coded Theme
Islamic values conveyed through digital storytelling	The teacher emphasized values of faith, gratitude, responsibility, and patience in each narrative (G1, G2). “The story taught me not to be envious and to always be grateful,” (S2). Observation showed reflective value discussions following the video screening (OBS).	Internalization of Islamic Values through Digital Stories
Transformation of students’ religious attitudes after digital storytelling learning	“Now I realize that Islamic stories are not just entertainment, but life lessons,” (S1). “I started reminding my friends not to use harsh words after watching the story,” (S3). Observation indicated behavioral changes such as advising one another, praying together, and interacting more politely (OBS).	Strengthening Adolescents’ Religious Character in the Digital Era

Pedagogical Creativity of PAI Teachers in Designing and Implementing Islamic Storytelling

AI teachers demonstrated creative and reflective capacity in designing Islamic digital storytelling that aligned with instructional goals and the character of madrasah students. The first teacher (G1) explained, “*Before creating the video, I select stories that are close to students’ lives, such as the story of Prophet Yusuf about guarding oneself.*” The second teacher (G2) added, “*I adjust the storyline to the moral education theme so students can easily understand it.*” These statements indicate a form of pedagogical consciousness, professional awareness in linking moral messages with students’ psychological and social contexts. The selection and structuring of stories were not incidental decisions, but deliberate efforts to situate religious narratives within adolescents’ lived realities.

Classroom observations further revealed that teachers did not merely present Islamic story videos as passive content. They facilitated reflective discussions afterward, inviting students to articulate the meanings they derived from the narratives. Each session concluded with moral reinforcement and a collective prayer. This practice resonates with Lambert (2013) view that the strength of digital storytelling lies in its capacity to create reflective space between educator and learner. In this case, creativity extended beyond technical video production or narrative scripting. It functioned transformative, reviving story-based da’wah in a format attuned to the digital lifeworld of adolescents. By integrating technology with moral narration, teachers cultivated a new learning ecology, one that intertwined faith and imagination, knowledge transmission and heart-oriented remembrance at the core of Islamic education.

Integration of Digital Technology in Educational Da’wah

In the PAI classroom context, teachers integrated digital media as a vehicle for educational da’wah. The second teacher (G2) stated, “*I use Canva and CapCut to create short Islamic story videos,*” while the first teacher (G1) added, “*We once uploaded students’ work to the madrasah YouTube channel so it could become digital da’wah.*” Classroom observations confirmed the use of projectors, Islamic-themed animations, and students’ involvement in editing or narrating

segments of the videos. These practices indicate that digital storytelling was not an occasional supplement, but an embedded component of instructional design.

This shift reflects a transformation in the role of the PAI teacher into that of a digital da'i, a spiritual communicator who utilizes technology as a medium for conveying Islamic values. Within Lambert's (2013) framework, digital storytelling invites participation and collaboration rather than positioning learners as passive recipients. In this case, students were encouraged to become co-creators of Islamic content, making the message of da'wah inseparable from the learning process itself. The act of producing, revising, and sharing stories became part of value formation.

Astuti (2022), suggests that such integration not only enhances learning interest but also strengthens students' religious engagement, as values are communicated through forms familiar and appealing to them. Within the madrasah context, this innovation illustrates that technology need not be framed as a threat to spirituality. Instead, it can function as a *wasilah*, a meaningful intermediary, through which religious commitment is articulated and reinforced among digitally immersed adolescents.

Emotional Resonance and Students' Spirituality

The findings indicate that Islamic digital storytelling generated strong emotional resonance among students. The first student (S1) stated, "*After watching the story, I feel more motivated to pray on time.*" The second student (S2) added, "*The story about the Prophet's companions made me realize the importance of patience,*" while the third student (S3) remarked, "*I have become more appreciative of my parents after watching that story.*" These expressions suggest that the digital Islamic narratives were not merely processed at a cognitive level, but awakened spiritual awareness and personal reflection.

Classroom observations revealed moments of silence, focus, and empathy as students engaged with the digital stories. The teacher allowed these quiet intervals to function as spaces for personal reflection before inviting students to articulate the meanings they derived. In Lambert (2013), perspective, such moments lie at the heart of story-based learning, where narrative touches the affective dimension of learners and fosters an emotional connection with the values conveyed.

Zakiyah (2021), argues that the cultivation of adolescents' religious character begins with repeated and meaningful emotional experiences. Within this context, Islamic digital storytelling operates as a spiritual bridge, transforming viewing into guidance, and digital exposure into moral contemplation. The process indicates that Islamic values are not merely taught as doctrinal content, but absorbed and experienced inwardly as part of students' evolving spiritual consciousness.

Internalization of Islamic Values through Digital Stories

PAI teachers intentionally embedded Islamic values such as faith, gratitude, responsibility, and patience within their digital narratives. Both teachers (G1, G2) emphasized that each video session concluded with reflective prompts and value-oriented discussion. One student (S2) expressed, "*The story taught me not to be envious and to always be grateful.*" Classroom observation further revealed that students wrote reflective notes at the end of the lesson, articulating their personal interpretations and commitments.

This process illustrates what Astuti (2019) describes as value internalization through affective and reflective experience. Islamic stories functioned as a medium through which moral concepts were connected to students' everyday realities. When students related prophetic narratives to their own lived situations, values shifted from abstract doctrinal knowledge to existential meaning. The movement was subtle but significant.

Pedagogically, this practice expands the function of digital storytelling beyond communication into the realm of spiritual pedagogy, value-based education grounded in reflection. The teacher's role extended beyond transmitting moral instruction toward cultivating moral consciousness embedded in how students think, feel, and act. In this sense, Islamic values conveyed through digital storytelling operated as catalysts in shaping religious character rather than as isolated instructional content.

Strengthening Adolescents' Religious Character in the Digital Era

The final finding indicates that Islamic digital storytelling played a significant role in strengthening the religious character of madrasah adolescents. The first student (S1) stated, "Now I realize that Islamic stories are not just entertainment, but life lessons," while the third student (S3) added, "I started reminding my friends not to use harsh words after watching the story." Classroom observations further revealed behavioral changes beyond the immediate lesson context: students advised one another, prayed together, and interacted more politely. These shifts, though gradual, suggest that the narratives extended their influence into everyday conduct.

Such developments reflect the emergence of religious awareness shaped through story-based learning experiences. Astuti (2019), argues that the strengthening of adolescents' religious character occurs when spiritual experiences are contextualized within their social dynamics. In this setting, Islamic digital storytelling functioned as a connective medium—linking Islamic values to the digital, fast-paced, and visually oriented world of adolescents. The stories did not remain confined to the screen; they entered social interaction. Through this process, digital storytelling became more than a pedagogical tool. It evolved into a formative space where religious meaning was negotiated, affirmed, and enacted in daily life.

Within Lambert's (2013) framework, narrative possesses the power to shape identity and moral orientation through imagination. When students engage with inspiring Islamic digital stories, they begin to reinterpret who they are and how they ought to conduct themselves as Muslims in a technology-driven era. This process of self-reflection becomes central to the strengthening of adolescents' religious character: a spirituality that grows from awareness rather than coercion, from lived experience rather than mere instruction.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic digital storytelling functions as an effective pedagogical approach for nurturing the religious character of madrasah adolescents. PAI teachers utilized digital media not merely as visual aids, but as platforms for spiritual reflection and religious character formation. This result aligns with Lambert's (2013) assertion that the strength of digital storytelling lies in its capacity to generate empathetic and narrative experiences that cultivate value awareness. Within the context of Islamic education, this reaffirms the enduring principle of *hikmah bil qashash*, the transmission of values through stories, which now evolves into digital form without losing its moral essence.

The pedagogical creativity demonstrated by PAI teachers in selecting, designing, and adapting Islamic digital narratives reflects an integration of spiritual sensitivity and digital literacy. Teachers aligned stories with lesson themes and students' social realities to ensure that moral messages resonated meaningfully. This practice corresponds with studies suggesting that digital storytelling in faith-based education fosters religious agency by inviting learners to construct meaning from their own experiences (Ervina et al., 2025; Kurdi, 2024). Similarly, Truong-White and McLean (2015) found that digital storytelling encourages active participation and reflective thinking in global citizenship education. In this light, PAI teachers operate as facilitators of meaning, bridging religious narratives with the digital lifeworld of contemporary youth.

The integration of digital technology into educational da'wah signals a paradigm shift from lecture-centered instruction toward participatory, media-based learning. Teachers not only transmit values but also design collaborative learning experiences. Khodijatussoleha et al., (2024) observed that classical Islamic narratives repackaged as animation or short videos enhance students' religious interest. This finding resonates with scholarship emphasizing that multimodal digital storytelling expands learning expression by integrating text, audio, and visual elements holistically (Azizah et al., 2025; Olvah et al., 2024; Puspitasari et al., 2025). The use of platforms such as Canva, CapCut, and YouTube positions PAI teachers as both content creators and digital da'i, delivering Islamic values in contextualized and accessible forms.

Students' emotional resonance with Islamic digital stories further demonstrates that digital storytelling penetrates the affective dimension of religious learning. When students report increased motivation to pray, greater patience, or deeper respect for parents, these responses signal meaningful affective engagement. Consistent with Spiegler et al. (2025), adolescent religious development is marked by the interplay of emotion, identity, and spiritual values. Meaningful religious experiences also contribute positively to adolescents' psychological well-being. Thus, Islamic digital narratives operate not merely as communication tools but as affective spaces where reflective spirituality is formed (Syafuddin, 2025; Tobib et al., 2025).

The internalization of Islamic values through digital storytelling reflects a convergence of moral instruction and personal experience. Teachers embedded values such as faith, gratitude, responsibility, and patience within narratives explicitly connected to students' lived realities. This outcome aligns with Khasawneh and Khasawneh (2024), who demonstrated that digital storytelling strategies enhance learning outcomes and moral awareness in Islamic education. Related studies likewise show that digital narratives can revitalize spiritual values within the PAI curriculum (Baiti & Putera, 2025; Rahma et al., 2024). From a value education perspective, reflective dialogue following storytelling strengthens internalization by engaging both emotional and cognitive dimensions (Astuti, 2022).

Moreover, the strengthening of adolescents' religious character in the digital era is evident in observable behavioral changes, such as mutual advising and collective prayer. Zakiyah (2021) emphasizes that adolescent religiosity develops through social experience and positive emotional engagement with religious values. Islamic digital storytelling provides a safe interpretive space in which adolescents can renegotiate their religious identity authentically and without coercion. Within Lambert's (2013) narrative framework, this process cultivates moral

imagination, the capacity to envision oneself as a faithful individual through internalized stories.

The study is limited by its single-site context and relatively small number of participants. Nonetheless, it opens avenues for further research examining the sustained impact of Islamic digital storytelling on adolescent religiosity through longitudinal designs. Future investigations may also explore the role of teachers' digital literacy and institutional support in expanding story-based educational da'wah practices. As suggested by Zainuddin et al. (2024), innovation in Islamic education grounded in digital narrative will become increasingly significant in shaping the religious character of millennial and post-millennial generations.

In sum, Islamic digital storytelling emerges as a PAI instructional strategy that integrates narrative power, spiritual values, and digital technology within a transformative framework. Through this approach, PAI teachers move beyond the transmission of doctrine toward awakening students' religious consciousness in participatory, reflective, and contextually responsive ways suited to the challenges of the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic digital storytelling constitutes an effective instructional strategy in PAI for fostering the religious character of madrasah adolescents. The implementation observed among PAI teachers reflects an integration of pedagogical creativity, technological innovation, and spiritual depth. Through digital Islamic narratives, values such as faith, patience, gratitude, and responsibility were not merely transmitted as doctrinal content but enacted within students' learning experiences. Digital narratives functioned as reflective spaces that activated students' affective and moral dimensions, consistent with narrative theory emphasizing the empathetic and transformative power of storytelling. The findings suggest that when PAI teachers are able to articulate Islamic values in contextual and meaningful forms, the internalization of those values can unfold organically and with depth.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that PAI teachers and madrasah institutions expand the practice of digital storytelling as a sustainable strategy for educational da'wah. Strengthening teachers' digital literacy competencies becomes a crucial prerequisite to ensure that Islamic messages are conveyed creatively and in alignment with students' digital realities. Institutional support, such as media training, the development of Islamic digital content, and collaboration among madrasahs, should also be enhanced to sustain this innovation. Future research is encouraged to examine the long-term impact of digital storytelling on adolescents' religious identity formation and to explore adaptive models of narrative-based spiritual cultivation within the context of technological advancement and the globalization of values.

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