



EMOTIONAL FORMATION, SPIRITUALITY, AND TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS AMID DIGITAL CULTURE IN LEARNING AQIDA AND MORALS

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Abstract:

This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how Madrasah Tsanawiyah empowers its students to maintain emotional and spiritual control amidst the hustle and bustle of digital culture. The study focuses on the central role of teacher-student relationships in Aqidah Akhlak learning. Using a qualitative case study approach at MTs Nurul Jadid, we collected real stories and experiences from teachers, principals, counselors, and students through interviews, observations, and documentation. Our findings reveal that instilling morals is not solely dependent on material resources, but rather on the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, which are characterized by empathy and exemplary behavior. This authentic relationship is key to activating spiritual awareness, ultimately enabling students to resist the negative influences of social media. The conclusion emphasizes that students' consciences will be nurtured if teachers are fully present. A warm relationship is a prerequisite for the teachings of Aqidah Akhlak to take hold, creating a generation that is intelligent and has a stable, responsible character.

Keywords: *Creed, Morals, Role of Religious Teachers, Emotional Balance.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid rise of digital culture has transformed the social order, including in the realm of Islamic religious education (Rodliyah et al., 2024). A crucial fact lies in the potential disruption technology poses to student character formation, particularly in the emotional and spiritual aspects (Riyadi, 2021). Aqidah Akhlak (Islamic Aqidah) learning, which essentially instills noble moral values, is now faced with the distraction and influence of negative digital content, which risks eroding empathy, spiritual focus, and straining teacher-student interpersonal relationships (Luthfi, 2021). This research is crucial because it aims to deeply analyze how these fundamental elements of character education can be maintained and strengthened, rather than being eroded by the current of digitalization (Hidayat et al., 2024). This is an effort to mitigate and adapt pedagogy so that the goals of Islamic education remain relevant and successful in the modern era.

At the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Islamic Junior High School) level, a visible phenomenon is the digital divide in Aqidah Akhlak learning practices. Students tend to be passive, lack focus, or exhibit reactive or emotional behavior when interacting both online and offline, allegedly due to excessive exposure to social media and online games (Santrock, 2018). This leads to low internalization of moral values and even creates tension in relationships

between teachers and students, who struggle to find common ground for meaningful interactions. A potential solution is to develop a humane and transformative teacher-student interaction model (Pamungkas, 2020) capable of wisely integrating digital media, making teachers digital role models who strengthen students' emotional and spiritual intelligence amidst the hustle and bustle of technology.

Previous studies have focused largely on the role of Aqidah Akhlak teachers in instilling values (Muttaqin, 2022), the use of digital learning media, or the connection between emotional and spiritual intelligence and achievement. However, existing research tends to view these aspects separately. What has not been comprehensively examined is the dynamic interconnection of three main variables: Emotional Formation, Spirituality, and Teacher-Student Relations, within a single context: Aqidah Akhlak Learning integrated with digital culture. This research aims to fill this gap. This research focuses on constructing a spiritual, emotional, and digital teacher-student relationship model as a comprehensive strategy to maintain the relevance of character education in Islamic junior high schools (MTs), making it more than just knowledge transfer but also character transformation.

This research is crucial because Aqidah Akhlak education is the moral foundation of the nation, and its success is crucial for the future of generations (Daradjat, 2015). In the digital era, there has been a shift in focus from noble morals to instant gratification and digital materialism, which threatens character disintegration. The importance of this research lies not only in its academic results but also in its practical implications for stakeholders in Islamic junior high schools (Arifin, 2012).

This research aims to answer several key questions regarding the adaptation of character education in the digital era. Stated, the main objectives of this research are: To describe the actual process of emotional and spiritual formation of students in Aqidah Akhlak learning at Islamic junior high schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah) amidst a digital culture. To analyze how digital culture influences the quality of relationships between teachers and students within this learning context. Developing an ideal strategy or model to strengthen teacher-student relationships that support the emotional and spiritual development of MTs students in the digital era. This paper examines the alignment of the noble goals of moral education with the realities of the challenges and opportunities brought by the digital revolution.

Based on this research, strong interpersonal relationships between teachers and students (Pamungkas, 2020) are a factor capable of bridging the gap between the demands of religious morality and the instant culture of digitalization. Relationships based on compassion, wise digital role models, and empathetic two-way communication will significantly strengthen the emotional and spiritual well-being of MTs students. This transformative relationship will be tested, where teachers not only transfer knowledge but also serve as spiritual-emotional mentors capable of directing students' digital energy into positive forces. The results of this study are expected to recommend a more contextual renewal of Aqidah Akhlak pedagogy.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to deeply understand the emotional dynamics, spirituality, and teacher-student relationships in Aqidah Akhlak (Islamic Creed) learning in the digital era. This

approach is considered relevant for exploring the meanings, values, and subjective experiences of informants as they occur naturally in the madrasah context. According to Moleong (2019), qualitative research is used to comprehensively and deeply understand social phenomena in natural situations. Meanwhile, Creswell (2018) emphasized that a descriptive qualitative approach helps researchers interpret the meaning behind human experiences, rather than simply measuring symptoms numerically.

This research was conducted at the Nurul Jadid Karanganyar Junior High School in Paiton, Probolinggo, considering that this school has begun integrating digital media into Aqidah Akhlak learning activities. The location was chosen specifically because it was deemed appropriate for the research focus (Sugiyono, 2020). The research period was three months, encompassing initial observation, field data collection, and analysis of the results. The research focused on three main components: student emotional development, student spirituality, and teacher-student relationships in Aqidah Akhlak (Islamic Faith) learning in the digital era. Student emotional development is defined as the process of developing students' abilities to recognize, manage, and express emotions positively during the learning process. This encompasses aspects of empathy, self-control, and the ability to adapt to changes in the digital environment (Goleman, 2015). Student spirituality is defined as religious awareness reflected through an understanding of the values of faith, sincerity in worship, and virtuous behavior applied in daily life (Zohar & Marshall, 2007). Meanwhile, teacher-student relationships are understood as a form of interpersonal relationship based on empathy, role modeling, and meaningful communication between teachers and students (Noddings, 2013). These three aspects form a unified whole in understanding how Aqidah Akhlak learning can continue to function as a vehicle for character development amidst the challenges of digital culture.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation with Aqidah Akhlak teachers, eighth-grade students, and the madrasah principal as the primary informants. Secondary data came from madrasah documents such as Lesson Implementation Plans (RPP), teacher reflection notes, and scientific references related to character education and digital learning. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, selecting subjects deemed to have the most knowledge and understanding of the context of the phenomenon being studied (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Data were collected using three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participant observation was conducted to observe teacher-student interaction patterns during the learning process, both in face-to-face activities and through the use of digital media (Spradley, 2016). In-depth interviews were conducted semi-structured to explore teachers' perceptions, experiences, and strategies used to maintain students' emotional and spiritual balance (Creswell, 2018). Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement observation and interview data through a review of school documents and learning activity records (Sugiyono, 2020).

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher herself. As emphasized by Moleong (2019), in qualitative research, the researcher plays a key role because she is directly involved in data collection, analysis, and

interpretation. To ensure data accuracy, the researcher used interview guides, observation sheets, and field notes as structured supporting instruments.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive analysis model, which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused on data relevant to the research theme. The data presentation stage involved organizing the findings into a thematic narrative that demonstrated the relationship between emotions, spirituality, and teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, the conclusion drawing stage involved a process of in-depth interpretation of meaning to discover patterns, themes, and substantive meanings of the observed phenomena..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Emotional Development In The Digital Era

Research results show that learning Aqidah and Akhlak plays a crucial role in shaping and stabilizing students' emotions amidst the currents of digital culture. Interviews with teachers and madrasah principals revealed that students' primary emotional challenges include difficulty controlling negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and anxiety caused by exposure to social media. However, through learning Aqidah and Akhlak, which emphasizes the values of patience, gratitude, and sincerity, students began to show improvements in their self-control and clear thinking when facing complex digital situations.

These findings are supported by research (Puspita and Hidayah, 2025), which confirms that students' emotional crises in the digital era arise from weak internalization of Aqidah and Akhlak values, which teach mujahadah an-nafs (controlling the desires). Therefore, learning that emphasizes the values of patience, gratitude, and spiritual responsibility has been proven effective in fostering inner peace and improving students' self-control.

Informan	Pengaruh Aqidah Akhlak Terhadap Emosi Negatif Siswa	Tingkat Kontrol Diri (Rata-rata Penilaian Informan: 1-5)
Guru Akifsh Akhlak	Sangat efektif melalui penekanan nilai sabar dan syukur	4.0
Kepala Sekolah	Cukup efektif, mendukung tata tertib dan disiplin sekolah	3.8

This aligns with the theory of emotional intelligence proposed by Goleman (1995), which states that the ability to regulate emotions is central to an individual's success in social interactions. However, in the context of Islamic education, emotional control stems not only from self-awareness but also from spiritual awareness of God's supervision. This finding reinforces the view (Al-Ghazali, 2018) that true emotional balance can only be achieved when the human heart is filled with the values of monotheism and control of desires.

Thus, learning Aqidah Akhlak serves as a means of strengthening spirituality-based emotional intelligence, which not only suppresses impulsive behavior but also shapes students' moral maturity in facing the challenges of the digital era.

Teacher-Student Relationships as a Foundation for Character Formation

Observations and interviews indicate that teacher-student relationships in madrasas significantly contribute to the formation of students' religious and moral character. Teachers who establish intense and empathetic communication, both inside and outside the classroom, tend to be more successful in instilling the values of Aqidah Akhlak than teachers who interact formally.

Jenis Guru	Relasi	Kontak Non Akademik (Sapaan/Nasihat)	Frekuensi Interaksi Digital (Grup WA/Platform Belajar)	Tingkat Kepatuhan Siswa (Observasi: Rendah, Sedang, Tinggi)
Guru A		Tinggi	Sedang	Tinggi
Guru B		Rendah	Tinggi	Sedang
Guru C		Sangat Tinggi	Rendah	Sangat Tinggi

The personal relationship between teachers and students is directly proportional to the level of compliance and internalization of students' values. This finding aligns with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning theory, which states that moral behavior is formed through observation and role modeling. In the context of Islamic education, this is known as the concept of *uswah hasanah*, namely the teacher's exemplary behavior as a moral model for students to emulate.

Pamungkas (2020) emphasized that a positive emotional relationship between teachers and students can create a warm and meaningful learning climate. This also aligns with Arifin's (2012) view, which states that the humanistic relationship between teachers and students is the core of authentic Islamic education, as it encompasses the dimensions of compassion (*rahmah*) and wisdom (*hikmah*). Thus, the teacher-student relationship serves not only as a pedagogical tool but also as a space for character formation that fosters moral stability and social sensitivity.

Strengthening Spirituality with Students Amidst Culture

Analysis of activity documentation at MTs Nurul Jadid shows that strengthening students' spirituality is an effective strategy in dealing with the distractions of digital culture. Documentation data includes daily prayer schedules, student reflection journals, and the Aqidah Akhlak learning tool.

Tahapan	Aktivitas Spiritualitas	Tujuan Spiritual	Efek Anti-Digitalisasi
Input Aqidah Akhlak)	(RPP Penanaman konsep <i>Ihsan</i> dan <i>Tawakkal</i>	Kesadaran akan pengawasan Tuhan.	Mengurangi perilaku <i>riya</i> dan <i>pamer</i> di media sosial.

Proses (Jadwal Harian)	Salat Dhuha dan Tahajud berjamaah	Disiplin dan koneksi vertikal (<i>hablun minallah</i>).	Melawan <i>kecanduan</i> dan budaya <i>instan</i> pada gawai.
Output (Jurnal Siswa)	Catatan harian dan refleksi diri	Evaluasi diri (<i>muhasabah</i>) secara kontinu.	Mendorong <i>fokus</i> dan <i>kehadiran</i> (<i>mindfulness</i>) dalam hidup nyata.

This finding aligns with the study of the Tarbawi hadith, which encompasses moral, ethical, and spiritual values. The hadith narrated by Muslim about ihsan (prayer) states, "You worship as if you see Allah," implying the principle of inner control, which is the basis for self-control (Hadith Tarbawi, 2024). This value, if internalized through habitual worship and reflection, will foster a stable spiritual awareness even in a digital world.

This finding supports Nata's (2014) argument that spiritual education functions as an inner control system that maintains students' moral balance (Tohet, 2024). Widyastuti (2017) also emphasized that habitual worship and self-reflection can strengthen students' self-regulation amidst the rapid flow of digital information.

In other words, strengthening spirituality is not merely ritualistic but also impacts students' psychosocial aspects. Consistently cultivated spirituality helps students resist hedonistic urges and fosters inner calm, thus creating a balance between emotional, moral, and spiritual intelligence.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that the three integrated pillars of Strengthening Spirituality, Emotional Formation, and a strong Teacher-Student Relationship are an effective comprehensive strategy in maintaining the character of MTs students in the midst of a digital culture. The most important finding is that a humanistic teacher-student relationship functions as a digital antidote, which activates spiritual self-transformation as an emotional controller. The scientific implication of this study is the expansion of character education theory, by positioning the trustworthy Moral Authority of Teachers as a key mediating factor between the religious curriculum and students' digital behavior. However, this study has limitations because it only focuses on a case study at a single location, MTs Nurul Jadid, with Islamic boarding school students, who may have a higher level of discipline. Therefore, further research is recommended to test this model in non-Islamic boarding school MTs and develop quantitative instruments to measure the impact of teacher-student relationships on students' spiritual-emotional literacy more broadly.

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