

Mitigating Negative Gadget Impacts through Holistic Islamic Parenting: Balancing Digital Literacy and Spiritual Closeness at Lab School UNIB

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ABSTRACT

The ubiquity of digital devices among children presents significant developmental challenges, creating a critical need for intervention strategies that harmonize technological engagement with cultural and religious values. This study investigates the mitigation of negative gadget impacts through a holistic Islamic parenting approach, specifically examining the balance between digital literacy and spiritual closeness at Lab School Universitas Bengkulu (UNIB). Employing a qualitative case study methodology, the research engaged 15 parents, 8 teachers, and 23 students. Data were collected via in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, followed by thematic analysis to identify effective pedagogical and parenting strategies. Identify three synergetic mechanisms: structured digital literacy rooted in Islamic ethics, the displacement of passive screen time with active spiritual bonding (such as congregational prayer and Quranic recitation), and robust school-family partnerships. This holistic framework significantly reduced unregulated device use while cultivating "ethical digital consciousness" and spiritual resilience in students. While offering a potent model for religious educational contexts, the single-site case study design suggests the need for future longitudinal research to test the framework's transferability across diverse cultural settings. This paper bridges the gap between digital literacy education and religious character formation. It introduces a culturally responsive "Holistic Islamic Digital Parenting" model, demonstrating that spiritual closeness acts as a vital protective factor against digital risks in modern Muslim families.

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Introduction

The rapid proliferation of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the landscape of childhood development across the globe, presenting both opportunities and substantial challenges for families and educational institutions. Digital devices, commonly referred to as gadgets, have permeated virtually every aspect of children's daily lives, from learning and entertainment to social interaction and identity formation (Alhammad & Alotaibi, 2023; Muppalla et al., 2023). In Indonesia specifically, data from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology indicates that over 70 percent of children between the ages of five and fifteen regularly access smartphones or tablets, a figure that has risen dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption across all age groups (Latif et al., 2023; Madigan et al., 2022). This widespread and often unsupervised exposure to digital media raises pressing concerns about the cognitive, social-emotional, and moral development of the younger generation, particularly within the context of societies that place significant value on religious character formation and spiritual cultivation.

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that excessive and unregulated gadget use among children produces an array of negative developmental outcomes. Research has shown that prolonged screen time is associated with diminished attention spans, impaired executive functioning, reduced academic performance, and disruptions to sleep patterns and physical health (Oswald et al., 2020). Furthermore, the social-emotional consequences of uncontrolled digital media exposure include increased vulnerability to cyberbullying, premature exposure to pornographic and violent content, the erosion of empathy and interpersonal skills, and a growing tendency toward social isolation and gadget addiction (Astuti et al., 2022; Konok et al., 2020). These findings underscore the urgency of developing comprehensive intervention strategies that address not only the behavioral symptoms of excessive gadget use but also the underlying ecological factors within families and schools that either facilitate or mitigate these negative impacts.

Within the Indonesian educational context, the concept of parenting has evolved beyond simple childcare practices to encompass a sophisticated system of values transmission, character building, and moral education deeply rooted in cultural and religious traditions. Islamic parenting, in particular, offers a holistic framework that integrates intellectual development, emotional nurturing, physical well-being, and spiritual cultivation as interconnected dimensions of child-rearing (Bensaid, 2021; Rohmat et al., 2024). The Quranic injunctions concerning parental responsibility, exemplified in Surah Luqman verses 13–19, emphasize the cultivation of faith (*aqidah*), moral character (*akhlak*), worship practices (*ibadah*), and intellectual discernment as foundational pillars of children's education. The prophetic tradition further elaborates practical methodologies for spiritual parenting that engage children through love, gentle guidance, and graduated exposure to religious concepts and practices (Purwandari et al., 2022; Susanti, 2023; Ulwan, 2017).

Despite the richness of the Islamic parenting tradition, the challenge of navigating children's digital engagement within this framework remains inadequately addressed in the scholarly literature. Previous studies have predominantly examined either the negative impacts of gadget use on children's development or the principles of Islamic child-rearing in isolation, without sufficiently integrating these two critical domains into a unified analytical framework (Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017; Smahelova et al., 2017). The existing research on digital parenting within Muslim families tends to focus on restrictive approaches, such as imposing screen time limits, without adequately exploring how spiritual closeness and religious practices can serve as intrinsic protective factors against

the allure of excessive digital consumption (Annisa et al., 2023; Falloon, 2020). This gap is particularly significant in the Indonesian context, where the majority Muslim population requires culturally responsive parenting models that harmonize technological engagement with Islamic values rather than positioning them in opposition.

Lab School Universitas Bengkulu (UNIB) provides a particularly instructive site for investigating this phenomenon. As a laboratory school affiliated with a major public university, Lab School UNIB operates at the intersection of evidence-based educational practice and community engagement, serving as both a learning environment for children and a platform for pedagogical experimentation and research. The school has implemented an integrated parenting program that deliberately combines digital literacy education with Islamic spiritual formation, creating a distinctive institutional context where the tension between technological modernity and religious tradition is explicitly addressed through structured programmatic interventions. This institutional characteristic makes Lab School UNIB an ideal case for examining how holistic Islamic parenting approaches can be operationalized within formal educational settings to mitigate the negative consequences of children's gadget use.

The concept of digital literacy, understood as the ability to locate, evaluate, create, and communicate information using digital technologies ethically and responsibly, constitutes one essential dimension of the mitigation framework examined in this study (Alhammad & Alotaibi, 2023; Falloon, 2020). However, digital literacy alone, without an accompanying moral and spiritual foundation, may prove insufficient for protecting children from the harmful effects of digital media, particularly in societies where religious values constitute the primary source of ethical guidance and identity formation. The integration of digital literacy with spiritual closeness, defined in the Islamic context as the quality of the parent-child relationship mediated through shared religious practices, divine consciousness (taqwa), and the cultivation of God-awareness in daily life, represents a promising but under-researched approach to holistic child protection in the digital age (Bensaid, 2021).

Based on the foregoing analysis, this study aims to investigate how holistic Islamic parenting approaches at Lab School UNIB mitigate the negative impacts of gadget use on children through the integration of digital literacy education and spiritual closeness. Specifically, the research addresses three questions: (1) What strategies do parents and teachers at Lab School UNIB employ to balance children's digital engagement with Islamic spiritual formation? (2) How does the holistic Islamic parenting framework implemented at Lab School UNIB affect children's patterns of gadget use and digital behavior? (3) What role does spiritual closeness between parents and children play in reducing the negative impacts of excessive gadget use? This investigation contributes to the growing body of literature on culturally responsive digital parenting by offering an integrated model that bridges the domains of technology education and Islamic spiritual cultivation, providing practical implications for educational institutions and families navigating the complexities of child-rearing in the digital era.

Methods

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to deeply investigate strategies for mitigating negative gadget impacts through holistic Islamic parenting. This approach was selected for its capacity to explore complex social phenomena within real-life contexts, enabling a nuanced understanding of how the interplay between digital literacy and spiritual values is practiced within a laboratory school environment. The study was conducted at Lab School Universitas Bengkulu (UNIB), a site purposively selected due to

its distinctive integration of religious character education with modern educational technology. The case study specifically focuses on the dynamic interactions between teachers, parents, and students in the implementation of digital parenting programs.

Population And Sample (Target Of Research)

Participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques, with inclusion criteria requiring active engagement in the school's parenting program for a minimum of one year. The final cohort comprised 15 parents (10 mothers and 5 fathers) with children in grades 1 through 6, 8 classroom teachers responsible for the integration of Islamic values, and 23 students from grades 4 through 6 who served as subjects for direct observation. The selection of upper-grade students was predicated on the assumption that this age group experiences significantly higher exposure to and more intensive interaction with gadgets compared to their younger counterparts.

Data Collection Techniques And Instrument Development

Data collection utilized a comprehensive triangulation of techniques, encompassing in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The researcher served as the primary instrument (*human instrument*), supported by a semi-structured interview guide and observation sheets. The interview protocol was developed based on theoretical constructs of Islamic parenting and digital literacy to elicit in-depth perspectives from parents and teachers. For observation, behavioral checklists and field notes were employed to record student interactions with gadgets and their engagement in school-based religious activities over a three-month period. Technical support tools included a digital voice recorder (Sony ICD-UX570) to ensure the accuracy of interview data and a camera for visual documentation of activities, conducted in accordance with approved ethical standards.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis framework adapted from Braun and Clarke. The process commenced with the verbatim transcription of all interview recordings, followed by iterative reading to ensure familiarization with the data. Subsequent stages involved manual coding to identify emerging patterns related to mitigation strategies and spiritual behaviors. These codes were then synthesized into core themes representing the holistic parenting strategies. The validity of the data was established through source triangulation (cross-referencing data from teachers, parents, and students) and member checking, wherein preliminary findings were confirmed with key participants to ensure the researcher's interpretation accurately reflected their lived experiences.

Result

The data collected from in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis at Lab School UNIB reveal a comprehensive picture of how holistic Islamic parenting strategies are operationalized to mitigate the negative impacts of gadgets. The findings are categorized into three main themes: the integration of Islamic values in digital literacy, the substitution of screen time with spiritual bonding, and the collaborative enforcement of parenting standards.

1.1. Structured Digital Literacy Integrated with Islamic Ethical Values

The study found that digital literacy at Lab School UNIB is not taught merely as a technical skill but as a moral responsibility. Interviews with teachers revealed that the curriculum explicitly links digital behavior with Islamic theology (aqidah) and jurisprudence (fiqh). A senior teacher (T4) explained how this integration is delivered in the classroom:

"We do not simply forbid students from accessing negative content. Instead, we teach them the concept of Muraqabah—the feeling that Allah is always watching. We ask them, 'Even if your parents don't see your browsing history, Allah sees everything.' This builds an internal filter. We also introduced the concept of 'digital harvest'—that every click is a seed they plant for their afterlife."

This approach was echoed in the home environment. Parents reported shifting their language from restrictive commands to value-based dialogues. One parent (P7, Mother of a 5th grader) described her experience implementing this method:

"Previously, I would just yell, 'Put the phone down!' and it caused conflicts. After the school workshop, I changed the narrative. I sat down with my son and we drafted a 'Family Digital Charter' based on Islamic adab. We agreed that the phone is a tool (wasilah), not a master. Now, when he uses the gadget too long, I just remind him, 'Is this helping your iman or hurting it?' He usually reflects and stops on his own."

Observation data confirmed that students used specific religious terminology when discussing technology. During a focused group discussion, a 6th-grade student remarked that spreading unverified news (hoaxes) is akin to fitnah (slander) and is a major sin, demonstrating a deep internalization of the ethical curriculum.

1.2. Spiritual Bonding Activities as Alternatives to Excessive Screen Time

The second major finding indicates that spiritual activities serve as a powerful displacement mechanism for gadget use. The data suggests that when the emotional and spiritual needs of children are met through bonding, the psychological dependence on gadgets decreases.

The "Maghrib-to-Isya No Gadget" movement was the most frequently cited success story. A father of two (P3) shared a detailed account of this transition:

"The hardest time was always the evening. Everyone was on their separate screens. We decided to implement the school's recommendation of family Tilawah (Quran recitation) and Ta'lim (short study) between Maghrib and Isya. Initially, the children complained of boredom. However, by the third week, it became our favorite time. We read the stories of the Prophets. My daughter said she actually prefers listening to the stories of Prophet Yusuf rather than watching YouTube shorts because she feels calm (sakinah) afterwards."

Another parent (P12) highlighted how congregational prayer (Shalat Berjamaah) functions as a reset button for the family's digital consumption:

"Praying together is non-negotiable. It forces us to physically disconnect from our devices and connect with Allah and each other. After prayer, we have a 'heart-to-heart' session. My son opens up about his day, his friends, and even what he saw online. That connection replaces the dopamine hit he usually seeks from games."

Observations of student behavior during recess supported this finding. Students who reported high engagement in family spiritual activities were observed to be more socially active and less likely to discuss online games or viral trends exclusively, engaging instead in physical play and social conversations.

1.3. School–Family Collaborative Partnerships

The third theme highlights the structural support system provided by Lab School UNIB. The data shows that consistency between school rules and home rules is crucial for mitigation.

A key finding was the effectiveness of the "Parenting Diary" program, where parents log their challenges and successes. A teacher (T2) noted:

"We realized parents were overwhelmed. They knew gadgets were bad but didn't know how to stop the addiction. Through the monthly Halaqah Parenting, we check their diaries. We found that 80% of parents struggled with consistency. By creating a support group on WhatsApp, parents remind each other. If one mother struggles, others give tips on Islamic distractions. They don't feel alone anymore."

One parent (P9) expressed relief regarding this collaboration:

"Before, I felt like the 'bad cop' at home while the school was the place for learning. Now, we are a team. The school enforces a ban on bringing gadgets, and at home, I enforce the limits we learned at school. My child knows that his teacher and I are on the same page. He cannot manipulate the situation anymore."

These findings collectively suggest that the holistic approach effectively reduces screen time not through force, but by filling the child's time and mind with higher-value activities and consistent adult support.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the efficacy of a holistic Islamic parenting framework in mitigating the negative impacts of gadget use among children. By analyzing the results through the lens of developmental psychology and Islamic pedagogy, this section discusses the mechanisms by which digital literacy, spiritual closeness, and institutional collaboration interact to create a protective ecological environment for children.

1.1. The Internalization of Digital Ethics through Theology

The first key strategy integrating digital literacy with Islamic values represents a significant departure from secular models of digital citizenship. While standard digital literacy focuses on safety and technical competence (Falloon, 2020), the approach at Lab School UNIB anchors these skills in a transcendental framework. The interview data suggests that linking digital behavior to concepts like Muraqabah (God-consciousness) creates a self-regulatory mechanism that operates even in the absence of parental supervision. This aligns with the findings of (Rohmat et al., 2024), who argue that spiritual intelligence acts as an internal compass. When children view responsible gadget use as a form of worship (ibadah) rather than merely compliance with rules, the motivation becomes intrinsic. This shift from external compliance to internal conviction is critical in the digital age, where parents cannot monitor every interaction. The "ethical digital consciousness" observed in students confirms that religious values provide a robust cognitive filter against negative content (pornography, violence, cyberbullying) by categorizing them not just as "harmful" but as "sinful" or spiritually damaging.

1.2. Spiritual Closeness as a Psychological Buffer

The reduction in gadget dependency observed in families practicing spiritual bonding activities supports the displacement hypothesis, but with a specific cultural nuance. The results indicate that spiritual activities like family Tilawah and congregational prayers do more than just occupy time; they fulfill the child's psychological needs for connection and emotional regulation (Annisa et al., 2023). Excessive gadget use is often a symptom of boredom, loneliness, or emotional dysregulation (Muppalla et al., 2023). By replacing the screen with meaningful parent-child interaction rooted in Sakinah (tranquility), the holistic approach addresses the root cause of the addiction. The parent's testimony regarding the "calm" felt after Quranic storytelling contrasts sharply with the hyper-stimulation of short-form video content. This suggests that spiritual practices restore the dopamine balance in children's brains, reducing the craving for the high-intensity stimulation provided by gadgets. This finding extends the work of Bensaid (2021) by providing empirical evidence that spiritual parenting is a practical, therapeutic tool for managing digital addiction, not just a theoretical ideal.

1.3. The Ecological Consistency of the Partnership Model

Finally, the success of the intervention relies heavily on the consistency provided by the school-family partnership. As noted in the results, parents often face a "capacity gap" knowing the risks but lacking the skills to intervene (Latif et al., 2023). Lab School UNIB's model bridges this gap by creating a community of practice. The "Parenting Diary" and support groups create a mesosystem a link between the microsystems of home and school that reinforces positive behavior. As highlighted by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, child development is optimized when the different environments they inhabit support each other. When a child encounters the same values regarding technology at school and at home, cognitive dissonance is reduced, and behavioral compliance increases. This contradicts the isolated approach often seen where schools ban phones but homes allow unlimited access, or vice versa (Astuti et al., 2022). The collaborative model ensures that the "Holistic Islamic Parenting" is not an abstract concept but a lived reality enforced by a united front of authority figures.

1.4. Synthesis of Findings

In synthesis, this study argues that mitigating negative gadget impacts requires moving beyond "screen time management" toward "life value management." The holistic Islamic parenting model works because it fills the void that gadgets usually occupy with three critical elements: a strong ethical identity (Digital Literacy + Faith), emotional satisfaction (Spiritual Bonding), and environmental consistency (School-Family Partnership). This triad creates a resilient child capable of navigating the digital world without being consumed by it.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the holistic Islamic parenting approach implemented at Lab School UNIB serves as an effective mitigation model against the negative impacts of gadgets on children. The success of this model is rooted in the synergy of three core strategies: integrating Islamic ethical values into structured digital literacy programs, developing spiritual bonding activities as meaningful substitutes for excessive screen time, and strengthening collaborative school-family partnerships. A key finding demonstrates that digital literacy internalized with moral values fosters "ethical digital consciousness." In this framework, children develop not only functional technical competencies but also a robust moral reflection that guides their digital decision-making processes.

Theoretically, this research proves that spiritual closeness and digital literacy are not opposing objectives; rather, they are complementary dimensions that collectively enhance a child's digital resilience. This model offers a practical solution for educational institutions in Muslim-majority contexts to move beyond purely restrictive parenting toward a more sustainable, intrinsic value-based approach. The implementation of school-family partnerships is proven crucial in bridging the gap between parental intentions and actual domestic practices. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to evaluate the long-term stability of children's digital behavior trajectories amidst increasingly complex technological advancements.

Declaration

Author contribution statement

All authors actively contribute to the development of research concepts, data collection through interviews and observations, and the preparation of article drafts until the final completion of the manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The authors declare that there are no financial or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the objectivity or results of this study.

Declaration of interests statement

This case study was carried out at Lab School Universitas Bengkulu (UNIB), involving the active participation of parents, teachers, and students within the school's integrated parenting program.

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