

## PAI Models: Shaping Digital-Religious Character in Vocational Schools

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**Abstract:** This study examines the role of Islamic Religious Education in shaping the Digital-Religious Character of Vocational High School students in Bandung amidst digital disruption and ethical degradation. Employing a comparative multi-site case study qualitative approach, this research compares two PAI implementation models: the Formal-Regulatory model at SMK Negeri 12 and the Internalization-Transcendental model at SMK Swasta Angkasa. The Formal-Regulatory model, based on government regulations and emphasizing sanctions, tends to produce temporary KDR and compliance-based adherence. Student compliance with digital communication, interaction, and content ethics is vulnerable to not being sustainable outside the school environment. Conversely, the Internalization-Transcendental model, which leverages cultural autonomy and instills the value of *muraqabah* (awareness of divine omnipresence) as its foundation, proves more effective in fostering intrinsic and sustainable KDR. The awareness of *muraqabah* strengthens students' Akidah dimension, forms Digital Self-Regulation, and integrates digital ethics as part of worship, manifested in Digital Sobriety and *Tabayyun* rooted in faith. This study affirms that *muraqabah* is a critical transversal variable determining the quality of KDR internalization. Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on PAI, digital ethics, and transcendental character education, particularly highlighting *muraqabah* as a spiritual foundation for Self-Control. Practically, these findings provide contextual references for the development of value-based and spiritually grounded digital literacy strategies relevant for VHS students.

**Keyword:** *Islamic Religious Education; Digital-Religious Character; Muraqabah; Digital Ethics.*

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini mengkaji peran Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam membentuk Karakter Digital-Religius siswa Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan di Bandung, menghadapi tantangan disrupsi digital dan degradasi etika. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif komparatif studi kasus multi-situs, penelitian ini membandingkan dua model implementasi PAI: model Formal-Regulatif di SMK Negeri 12 dan model Internalisasi-Transendental di SMK Swasta Angkasa. Model Formal-Regulatif, yang didasarkan pada regulasi pemerintah dan penekanan sanksi, cenderung menghasilkan KDR yang bersifat sementara dan kepatuhan eksternal (*compliance-based*). Kepatuhan siswa pada etika komunikasi, interaksi, dan konten digital rentan tidak berkelanjutan di luar lingkungan sekolah. Sebaliknya, model Internalisasi-Transendental, yang memanfaatkan otonomi kultural dan menanamkan nilai *muraqabah* (kesadaran pengawasan ilahi) sebagai fondasi, terbukti lebih efektif dalam

*mendorong KDR yang intrinsik dan berkelanjutan. Kesadaran muraqabah memperkuat dimensi Akidah siswa, membentuk Digital Self-Regulation, dan menjadikan etika digital sebagai bagian dari ibadah, yang termanifestasi dalam Digital Sobriety dan Tabayyun yang didasari iman. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa muraqabah adalah variabel transversal krusial yang menentukan kualitas internalisasi KDR. Secara teoretis, studi ini memperkaya diskursus PAI, etika digital, dan pendidikan karakter transendental, menyoroti muraqabah sebagai fondasi spiritual bagi Self-Control. Praktisnya, temuan ini menyediakan referensi kontekstual untuk pengembangan strategi literasi digital berbasis nilai dan spiritual yang relevan bagi siswa SMK.*

*Kata kunci: PAI; Karakter Digital-Religius; Muraqabah; Etika Digital.*

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## **Introductions**

The 21st century is marked by the acceleration of digitalization and technological disruption, which significantly transformed nearly all aspects of human life, including education (Jackman et al., 2021). The development of information technology offers easy access to knowledge, expands learning spaces, and opens opportunities for pedagogical innovation. However, the digitalization surge also introduces new challenges such as information overload, misinformation, disinformation, and ethical degradation in social interactions (Chairunisa & Humaizi, 2024; Nurhabibah et al., 2025). This situation demands that education not only focus on knowledge and skill mastery but also on strengthening character and moral values to guide students in navigating digital era challenges (Chairunisa & Humaizi, 2024; Faizah et al., 2023).

Vocational high school students occupy a strategic yet dilemmatic position (Setiyawan et al., 2023). On one hand, SMK are required to produce graduates with vocational competencies adaptive to industrial technology (Rosina et al., 2021). On the other hand, SMK students, mostly adolescents in the identity formation phase, are highly vulnerable to digital residues such as hate speech, cyberbullying, and hoaxes (Lahti et al., 2024). The disparity between high media access and low ethical literacy risks producing a technically proficient yet morally and spiritually fragile generation (Setyawati et al., 2022; Zurwanty et al., 2025). This condition urgently necessitates integrating technological mastery with religious values (Karo-Karo et al., 2023), positioning Islamic Religious Education as central (Nabilah et al., 2024; Trianita et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, PAI implementation in many SMK still exhibits limitations (Delcker, 2022). PAI learning tends to emphasize cognitive aspects and formal rituals, focusing on material mastery and curriculum fulfillment (Idris, 2023). Contextual dimensions, particularly discussions of real digital ethics issues faced by

students, are often not systematically integrated into the learning process (Noguera et al., 2024). Consequently, religious values taught in class are not fully internalized or reflected in students' digital behavior outside school (Imama et al., 2025).

Strengthening religious character in the digital context requires integrating Islamic values with digital literacy (Hasanah et al., 2024). Digital-religious character can be understood as a fusion of robust *aqidah* (faith), worship discipline, noble morals, and Islamic digital literacy proficiency (Astuti et al., 2024). Theologically, Islamic digital ethics has a strong normative foundation (Shodiqoh, 2024). The *tabayyun* principle stresses verifying information before accepting or disseminating it, preventing errors and social harm (Harizan & Mydin, 2024; Samsir, 2024). Additionally, *muraqabah* fosters awareness that every human action is under Allah SWT's constant supervision (Isgandarova, 2024; Mazlan et al., 2025). This transcendental awareness underpins intrinsic compliance, motivating ethical behavior not from external pressures but from faith-driven spiritual responsibility (Adnan & Ramli, 2024; Harianti et al., 2022). Thus, Islamic digital ethics is not merely regulative but also internal and transcendental (Shehata et al., 2023).

Previous studies highlight compliance with laws, social norms, and individual responsibility in digital technology use. According to (Murjani, 2025), digital citizenship encompasses knowledge, skills, and attitudes for safe, ethical participation in digital spaces. This approach builds media awareness but remains secular and externally regulatory, as outlined by Wulandari, Rohmad, and Yaqin (Wulandari et al., 2025). Subsequent research integrates digital literacy with character education, emphasizing balance between technical skills and moral values. In Indonesia, PAI is seen as having the potential to shape digital-religious character. Recent studies spotlight integrating Islamic values for media ethics and spiritual awareness, as emphasized by Eryandi (Eryandi, 2023), who underscores transcendental values as key to effective character formation.

Although efforts exist to integrate Islamic values into digital ethics, specific empirical studies on digital literacy and PAI integration remain limited, especially at classroom implementation and in vocational high school contexts. Existing works like (Murjani, 2025) and Wulandari et al. (Wulandari et al., 2025) are largely conceptual, with minimal field implementation analysis. Empirical investigations into PAI's role in shaping SMK students' digital ethics, along with public-private school comparisons, are rare. Furthermore, spiritual self-control based on *Al-Raqib* (*muraqabah*) awareness has not been systematically operationalized in digital ethics education, nor has there been an in-depth comparative analysis of how school culture affects PAI's effectiveness in forming digital-religious character.

This study fills these gaps by comparing PAI implementation at SMK Negeri 12 Bandung and SMKS Angkasa Bandung. This comparison is crucial as the schools

represent contrasting institutional traits: strict government regulation dominance in public schools versus cultural autonomy flexibility in private schools. The novelty lies in formulating an Islamic digital ethics model balancing formal regulation, school culture, and theological awareness as foundations for sustainable digital-religious character formation. Practically, it provides contextual references for developing spiritual value-based digital literacy strategies for SMK students.

## **Method**

This research employs a qualitative approach with a comparative multi-site case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen to focus on an in-depth understanding of the meanings, processes, and strategies of Islamic Religious Education (Sugiyono, 2012). This aligns with the postpositivist philosophy, studying objects in natural conditions and emphasizing meaning over generalization (Wijaya, 2018). The multi-site case study design was selected because the research is conducted at two schools with contrasting contexts, SMK Negeri 12 Bandung and SMKS Angkasa Husein Bandung, enabling systematic comparison and analytical generalization (Yin, 2018) to enrich the theory of religious-digital character formation. The research locations were set at two vocational high schools with distinct characteristics: SMK Negeri 12 Bandung, representing a public school subject to strict government regulations, and SMKS Angkasa Husein Bandung, representing a private school with greater flexibility in curriculum development and religious programs.

Research subjects were determined using purposive sampling to select informants with the most in-depth knowledge regarding the research focus. This was expanded using snowball sampling until data saturation was reached (Naderifar et al., 2017). The study involved a total of 28 participants from both schools, comprising principals/vice-principals for curriculum, PAI teachers, Guidance and Counseling. The snowball sampling process was terminated once additional informants provided no significant new insights, ensuring the depth of the gathered data.

Data were obtained through source triangulation, encompassing: (1) primary data from in-depth interviews and participatory observation of learning processes and digital interactions; (2) secondary data from official school documents; and (3) tertiary data from relevant academic literature. The research procedure followed systematic stages: preparation (literature review and licensing), data collection (interviews, observation, document review), data processing (transcription and categorization), and analysis. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and mitigate potential researcher bias, this study applied the principle of reflexivity. The researcher acknowledges that personal background and prior understanding of PAI

and digital ethics may inherently influence data interpretation. To address this, detailed field journals were maintained to reflect on initial assumptions and personal reactions to the data. Furthermore, member checking was conducted to validate findings with participants, and peer debriefing was utilized to test the reliability of interpretations against alternative perspectives.

The data analysis technique utilized the Interactive Model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Hasibuan, 2018; Miles et al., 2014). Specifically for the comparative analysis between the two schools, the following systematic procedures were applied. First, data condensation involved processing data from each school separately, with transcripts and field notes coded to identify key themes relevant to the research questions, such as "gadget regulation," "teacher's role," "tabayyun awareness," and "muraqabah practices." Second, cross-case data display presented findings in comparative matrices to juxtapose key findings from SMK Negeri 12 and SMKS Angkasa, enabling the identification of similarities and differences in inputs, processes, and outputs, while focusing on how institutional characteristics influenced the internalization of Islamic digital literacy dimensions. Third, conclusion drawing and verification entailed developing initial conclusions regarding the effectiveness of each model, for instance, assessing whether "muraqabah awareness" in the private school served as a crucial transversal variable for character internalization compared to sanction-based compliance in the public school, with these conclusions iteratively verified against empirical evidence.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Result**

This comparative qualitative study identifies two dominant models of Islamic Religious Education implementation in shaping students' Digital-Religious Character in vocational high schools in Bandung. The models are the Formal-Regulative model at SMK Negeri 12 Bandung and the Internalization-Transcendental model (based on Muraqabah and a hidden curriculum) at SMK Swasta Angkasa. The differences between these two models are rooted in contrasting institutional characteristics: public schools with a structural-regulative approach and private schools with cultural-spiritual autonomy.

Based on the literature review, this study employs four conceptual dimensions of DRC, namely Akidah, Ibadah, Akhlak, and Islamic Digital Literacy. Cross-case analysis reveals that these four dimensions are empirically manifested into three observable domains of digital ethical behavior in the field: Etika Komunikasi, Etika Interaksi, and Etika Konten.

### **The Formal-Regulative Model at SMK Negeri 12 Bandung**

The findings indicate that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMK Negeri 12 Bandung is dominated by a Formal-Regulative framework.

In terms of input, PAI policies are tightly bound to the national curriculum, the P5 projects (Project for Strengthening the Profile of Pancasila Students), and strict regulations regarding device usage. Regarding the process, the formation of KDR (Religious Digital Piety) is conducted through rule-based compliance mechanisms, teacher supervision, and the enforcement of sanctions.

In practice, this model appears effective in shaping students' Communication Ethics and Interaction Ethics while they are within the school environment. However, the resulting digital compliance tends to be situational and highly reliant on external supervision. This condition is reflected in the following statement by a teacher informant:

*"We always remind students about the sanctions if they are caught accessing inappropriate sites or bullying on social media. So far, they are compliant at school, but we are also aware that once they are at home, without supervision, that control is lost. Their compliance is still external." (VP-1)*

A student also added, *"If we are at school, yes, we obey because we are afraid of getting caught by the teachers. But at home, sometimes if friends invite me along, I just join in, especially if my parents aren't around." (S-1).*

In the domain of Content Ethics, students experience difficulty in independently applying the principle of tabayyun (verification). The dimension of Islamic Digital Literacy has not been strongly internalized; therefore, information verification practices are driven more by the desire to avoid school sanctions or legal consequences than by an awareness of religious values.

### **The Transcendental Internalization Model at SMK Swasta Angkasa**

In contrast to SMK Negeri 12, findings at SMK Swasta Angkasa show a dominance of the Transcendental-Internalization model grounded in the value of muraqabah (mindfulness of God's supervision). In terms of input, the school possesses cultural autonomy that allows for the integration of PAI values into the entire school culture. Regarding the process, value internalization is carried out through teacher role modeling, routine worship practices, the habituation of digital sobriety, and instilling the awareness that every digital activity is under the supervision of Allah SWT.

This model encourages the formation of Interaction Ethics and Content Ethics that are more stable and tend to be autonomous. Student compliance does not depend on formal sanctions, but rather on self-control based on transcendental values. This is emphasized by a teacher informant's statement:

*"Sanctions are not the main thing here; awareness is. We often invite students to reflect on who is most worthy of being feared in the digital world. Once muraqabah is internalized, they automatically realize the need to limit screen time and choose beneficial content." (T-1)*

This view is supported by students: "We are taught that Allah is always watching, so if we want to open something strange, we think twice. It just doesn't feel right." (S-3, Student, SMKS Angkasa Husein). Furthermore, another student commented, "Friends here also often remind each other if someone starts crossing the line in group chats or when posting something, because we feel like one family." (S-3).

Additionally, peer control grounded in ukhuwah Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood) appears to play a significant role in maintaining Communication Ethics and Interaction Ethics. Solidarity rooted in religious values encourages students to remind one another regarding their use of digital media.

Overall, the findings suggest that the Formal-Regulative model tends to produce KDR that is compliance-based and situational, whereas the Transcendental-Internalization model has the potential to produce KDR that is more intrinsic and autonomous. These differences form the basis of the analysis presented in the discussion section.

Table 1. Comparison of DRC Implementation Based on the Coombs System Framework

System Elements	PAI Implementation Model: Formal-Regulative (SMKN 12 Bandung)	PAI Implementation Model: Hidden Curriculum & Muraqabah (SMK Angkasa Bandung)
I. Input	Formal-Regulative: PAI policies are bound to the national curriculum and the P5 project. Teacher and school regulations are strict.	Cultural-Spiritual: PAI integration is strengthened through school religious value autonomy, with an emphasis on daily routines and <i>digital detox</i> .
II. Process	Compliance habituation: Emphasis on rules, strict sanctions, and school-directed PAI learning with close supervision.	Intrinsic value cultivation: PAI internalization through teacher exemplification, habituation, and <i>muraqabah</i> as self-control.
III. Output	Temporary character: DRC is formed but tends to exist only under supervision.	Sustainable character: DRC is intrinsically formed and persists beyond supervision.
Empirical Projection		
Communication Ethics	Regulative compliance in digital communication and interaction.	<i>Digital Sobriety</i> : Cautious interaction driven by moral values and <i>muraqabah</i> awareness.

System Elements	PAI Implementation Model: Formal-Regulative (SMKN 12 Bandung)	PAI Implementation Model: Hidden Curriculum & Muraqabah (SMK Angkasa Bandung)
Interaction Ethics	Self-control is governed by school regulations and sanctions.	<i>Digital Self-Regulation</i> : Digital self-control is perceived as part of a worship-oriented struggle.
Content Ethics	<i>Tabayyun</i> is practiced to avoid school or legal sanctions.	<i>Tabayyun</i> is driven by faith to avoid sin and harm.

Source: Research Findings (2025)

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the primary difference between the two PAI implementation models lies in the source of motivation for the internalization of DRC values. At SMK Negeri 12, the Formal-Regulative approach positions PAI as an instrument of structural compliance. Gadget regulations, sanctions, and the integration of PAI within the curriculum and the P5 Project are effective in suppressing digital misconduct within the school environment; however, they have not been able to foster sustainable digital self-control. Student compliance is compliance-based and tends to weaken when external supervision is no longer present. This is largely due to the inherent nature of the digital world, which often offers a sense of anonymity and privacy that cannot be fully reached by the physical oversight of teachers. This characteristic of digital spaces makes external, physical regulation less effective in ensuring consistent ethical behavior once direct supervision is removed, thereby highlighting why a deeper, internalized form of control is essential. This condition suggests that the dimensions of Akhlak and Islamic Digital Literacy at SMK Negeri 12 develop primarily at a cognitive-normative level, but are weak in terms of value internalization. The principle of *tabayyun* taught in PAI has not fully transformed into students' personal awareness in Content Ethics. This indicates that the hidden curriculum in public schools remains oriented toward formal compliance, resulting in a DRC that is temporary in nature.

In contrast, SMK Swasta Angkasa applies a Transcendental Internalization model by positioning *muraqabah* as a key value embedded throughout the school culture. *Muraqabah* functions as a direct link between the dimension of Akidah and the practice of Digital Self-Regulation. The theological awareness that every digital activity is under the supervision of Allah SWT transforms students' motivation for compliance from extrinsic to intrinsic. This transformation occurs through a sustained process of reflection and internal monitoring. By consistently reminding

students that their digital actions are observed by God, the school cultivates an internal locus of control. This means that students are not merely avoiding misbehavior due to fear of external punishment, but rather actively choosing ethical conduct as an act of devotion and a manifestation of their faith. This intrinsic motivation strengthens their Akidah (creed) and prompts a conscious "Digital Self-Regulation," where ethical choices in digital spaces become a part of their spiritual discipline and worship (Ibadah). This consciousness also manifests in "Digital Sobriety" and "Tabayyun," where critical thinking and verification are driven by a spiritual responsibility to uphold truth and avoid sin. Additionally, peer control rooted in ukhuwah Islamiyah at SMK Swasta Angkasa strengthens Interaction Ethics and shapes healthy collective digital norms. This collective reinforcement acts as a social mechanism that supports individual muraqabah, creating an environment where ethical digital behavior is both personally motivated and communally upheld.

Comparative discussion based on the four dimensions of DRC shows that the Formal-Regulative model tends to address only the surface level of Akhlak and Islamic Digital Literacy, whereas the muraqabah-based model is able to simultaneously penetrate the dimensions of Akidah and Ibadah. These findings affirm muraqabah as a critical transversal variable in the formation of DRC. The integration of transcendental values is proven to be a significant factor in fostering the sustainability of students' digital character.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the observed differences in DRC internalization may also be influenced by factors beyond the PAI implementation models themselves. For instance, private schools like SMKS Angkasa often have a degree of autonomy that allows for more integrated value-based curricula, which might attract students and families already predisposed to religious values. This potential "selection bias" in student intake, alongside varying socioeconomic and family backgrounds, could play a role in shaping students' character independent of, or in conjunction with, the school's specific PAI model. Factors such as parental involvement in religious education at home or differences in access to digital devices and exposure to various online content outside school hours were not the primary focus of this study but could offer additional layers of understanding. While this qualitative study provides rich, in-depth insights into the mechanisms at play, its generalizability might be tempered by these unexamined external variables. Therefore, while muraqabah shows strong potential as a core mechanism, asserting its singular effectiveness without considering the broader ecological context of the students would be an oversimplification. Future research employing mixed-methods approaches could further disentangle the interplay of these various factors.

Thus, the theoretical contribution of this study lies in the formulation of an Islamic digital ethics model that balances formal regulation, school culture, and theological consciousness as the foundation for sustainable Digital-Religious Character formation. This approach demonstrates that effective digital ethics education moves beyond mere compliance, embedding spiritual responsibility as a cornerstone of self-regulation.

Further, this study makes a significant theoretical contribution by positioning its findings within the broader academic discourse. Early studies on media ethics in the digital era largely developed within the framework of digital citizenship, emphasizing compliance with laws, social norms, and individual responsibility in the use of technology (Murjani, 2025). Within this perspective, digital ethics is understood as a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to participate safely and responsibly in digital spaces (Murjani, 2025). While this approach has contributed significantly to media awareness, it tends to be secular and oriented toward external regulation, positioning digital ethics more as rule compliance than as internalized value awareness (Wulandari et al., 2025). As the discourse on character education evolved, subsequent studies began integrating digital literacy with moral value formation. In the Indonesian context, Islamic Religious Education has been viewed as having strategic potential to shape religious-digital character through the integration of Islamic values into instruction and school culture (Eryandi, 2023).

Nevertheless, most of these studies remain at the normative-curricular level and have not explicitly explained how religious values are internalized into self-sustaining digital self-control mechanisms. It is within this gap that the present study is positioned. The findings demonstrate that the internalization of transcendental values, particularly *muraqabah*, functions as the primary binding mechanism linking the dimensions of *Akidah*, *Ibadah*, *Akhlak*, and Islamic Digital Literacy in the formation of Digital-Religious Character. This perspective aligns with Eryandi's argument that character education becomes sustainable only when it is grounded in transcendental consciousness that connects human behavior with divine accountability (Eryandi, 2023). Accordingly, this study extends the discourse on digital media ethics by demonstrating that cognitive literacy and regulative compliance must be complemented by spiritual value internalization in order to foster effective digital self-regulation, even beyond institutional supervision. Through this approach, the *muraqabah*-based Transcendental Internalization model is positioned as a conceptual enrichment of the digital citizenship paradigm, particularly within the context of Islamic education in the digital era.

## Conclusion

This study identifies and compares two models of Islamic Religious Education implementation in shaping the Digital-Religious Character of Vocational High School students in Bandung. The fundamental difference between the Formal-Regulatory model at SMK Negeri 12 and the Internalization-Transcendental model at SMK Swasta Angkasa lies in the source of motivation for students' compliance with digital ethics. The Formal-Regulatory model, bound by government regulations and emphasizing sanctions, tends to produce KDR that is temporary and external (*compliance-based*). Student adherence to digital communication, interaction, and content ethics heavily relies on physical supervision and school rules, making it vulnerable to not being sustainable outside the school environment.

Conversely, the Internalization-Transcendental model at SMK Swasta Angkasa, which leverages cultural autonomy and instills the value of *muraqabah* as its foundation, successfully fosters intrinsic and sustainable KDR. The awareness of divine omnipresence (*muraqabah*) strengthens the students' *Akidah* dimension, forms *Digital Self-Regulation*, and makes digital ethics a part of worship, manifested in *Digital Sobriety* and *Tabayyun* rooted in faith. Therefore, this study affirms that *muraqabah* serves as a critical transversal variable determining the quality of KDR internalization. The integration of transcendental values in PAI proves more effective in forming robust character compared to approaches that solely focus on external regulations. Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on PAI, digital ethics, and transcendental character education, particularly by highlighting *muraqabah* as a spiritual foundation for *Self-Control*. Practically, these findings provide contextual references for the development of value-based and spiritually grounded digital literacy learning strategies relevant for vocational high school students.

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