

Constructing Digital Adab In Early Childhood: An Islamic Ethical Perspective On Children's Digital Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology has become increasingly present in young children's learning environments, raising questions about how digital behaviour can be guided beyond technical competence toward moral formation. This study examines how digital adab is constructed through Islamic ethical education at RA Al-Islamiyyah Kemayoran, Central Jakarta. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the head of the RA, teachers, and parents and analysed thematically. The findings reveal three interconnected patterns. First, digital engagement is purposeful and mediated: digital media are used selectively, screened for age and educational appropriateness, and positioned as supplementary to play, storytelling, religious practice, and direct interaction. Second, responsible digital behaviour is cultivated through boundaries and habituation, including permission, time limits, interruption, redirection, and repeated emphasis on discipline, responsibility, respect, honesty, and beneficial use. Third, continuity between school and home reinforces these practices by creating a shared moral environment in which digital behaviour is connected with religious awareness and accountability. The study conceptualises digital adab as an emerging Islamic ethical orientation rather than merely digital literacy or digital ethics. Grounded in ta'dib, akhlaq, and muraqabah, digital adab describes the gradual formation of purposeful, restrained, responsible, and morally aware engagement with digital media during early childhood.

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Introduction

Digital technology has become part of the everyday environment in which young children grow, learn, play, and interact with others. Smartphones, smart televisions, digital videos, educational applications, and other forms of screen-

based media can now be encountered at home as well as in early childhood education settings. For young children, the issue is no longer simply whether digital technology should be introduced, but how children learn to live with it. This question becomes particularly important because early childhood is a formative period in which patterns of behaviour, interpersonal relationships, and moral dispositions are gradually established. Research on children in the digital age has consequently moved beyond questions of access to technology toward issues of agency, protection, participation, and the quality of children's digital experiences (Livingstone & Third, 2017). Studies of young children's use of applications have also shown that digital media can become part of play and creative activity, although the nature of these experiences depends considerably on the content, design, and context of use (Marsh et al., 2018).

The presence of technology in children's lives also raises questions about adult guidance. Young children do not encounter digital media independently of their social environment. Parents and teachers determine what children can access, how long they can use particular devices, which forms of content are considered appropriate, and what activities follow digital engagement. (Nikken & Schols, 2015) demonstrate the importance of parental mediation in shaping young children's media use, while (Ata-Aktürk & Akman, 2024) show that technology use among children aged three to six is closely related to parental mediation, patterns of use, and screen-related practices. In early childhood education, the quality of digital interaction is equally significant. (Howard et al., 2026) argue that children's digital experiences need to be understood in relation to interaction, engagement, agency, and the relationship between digital activity and children's broader learning experiences. These studies suggest that children's digital behaviour develops within a network of adult guidance, social interaction, and everyday habits.

The question becomes more complex when children's digital behaviour is examined from an Islamic ethical perspective. Islamic education does not regard the formation of a morally good person as equivalent to the acquisition of knowledge or technical competence. The ability to operate a device, navigate an application, or access digital information does not necessarily indicate an ability to use technology appropriately. A child may know how to open a video, for example, without knowing whether the content is appropriate, whether watching it should continue, or why certain forms of digital behaviour should be avoided. The ethical question concerns the orientation of behaviour: what should be accessed, how should it be used, when should it be stopped, and what kind of conduct should accompany its use?

This concern resonates with the Islamic concept of *adab*. (Al-Attas, 1980) places *ta'dib* at the centre of Islamic education and connects education with the formation of a person who recognises the proper order of knowledge, action, and conduct. *Adab* in this sense extends beyond manners in a narrow behavioural sense. It concerns the capacity to recognise the proper place of things and to act accordingly. Applied to children's digital lives, this perspective opens a different way of understanding technology. The issue is not simply whether children are digitally

literate or whether their screen time is controlled. It is whether children gradually develop an understanding of how technology should be approached, what purposes are appropriate, what forms of content should be avoided, and how their own desires should be regulated.

The ethical dimension can be developed further through Al-Ghazali's account of moral formation. His discussion of *akhlaq* emphasises the relationship between repeated conduct, habituation, self-discipline, and the formation of moral dispositions. Moral behaviour is not sustained only by external instruction. Rules and supervision may initiate a behaviour, but ethical formation involves the gradual development of an internal disposition that guides action. Concepts such as *muraqabah*, self-restraint, and habituation are particularly relevant to children's emerging relationship with digital media. They allow digital behaviour to be examined not only as compliance with adult restrictions but also as an early process of learning to regulate one's own actions in accordance with moral values.

Recent scholarship in Islamic education has begun to address this broader ethical dimension of digital life. (Mintasih et al., 2024) examine the integration of digital technology into Islamic Religious Education and highlight the importance of teachers' competence in managing digital learning. (Mentari et al., 2026) explicitly discuss digital ethics from an Islamic education perspective, while Mu'min et al. (2026) examine the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping students' digital ethics. (Samhudi & Sani, 2026) similarly connect Islamic education with the digital ethics of the Alpha Generation. Other studies have approached digital ethics through specifically Islamic concepts, including *tabayyun* as a means of responding to the post-truth digital environment (Mukaromah et al., 2026) and the changing relationship between religious authority and technological algorithms (Farida et al., 2026). These studies demonstrate that digital behaviour has become an emerging concern within Islamic educational discourse.

Yet digital ethics and *adab* are not necessarily interchangeable concepts. Much of the existing discussion focuses on digital literacy, responsible technology use, teachers' roles, or ethical strategies for dealing with digital media. Such approaches are valuable, but they leave a conceptual question open: how can Islamic moral values become embodied in the everyday digital behaviour of young children? The distinction matters because early childhood is not simply a period in which children are taught ethical rules. It is also a period in which repeated actions, adult modelling, boundaries, and everyday routines contribute to the formation of behavioural dispositions. Digital behaviour therefore needs to be considered as part of moral formation rather than as an isolated technological skill.

Research on Islamic early childhood education provides an important starting point for addressing this question. (Ramadani et al., 2025), for example, examine the integration of digital media in Islamic early childhood education and demonstrate that digital technology can be incorporated into early learning within an Islamic educational environment. Research on early childhood digital literacy has similarly emphasised the need for age-appropriate approaches to introducing children to digital environments (Suryadi et al., 2026). These studies establish the relevance of

digital technology within early childhood education, but the ethical formation of children's digital behaviour remains less developed as an analytical concern. The existing literature tells us much about technology use, mediation, literacy, and educational integration; it tells us less about how these practices can be interpreted as the formation of an Islamic moral disposition.

The empirical setting of RA Al-Islamiyyah Kemayoran, Jakarta, provides an opportunity to explore this issue. Interviews with the head of the RA, teachers, and parents indicate that digital technology is introduced to children under conditions of guidance and limitation. The school does not position gadgets as the primary medium of learning. Digital materials are used selectively, teachers review content before showing it to children, and digital activities are accompanied by explanation and direct interaction. Teachers also redirect children toward play, social interaction, drawing, block activities, and religious practices when digital media begins to attract excessive attention. Parents describe similar practices at home, including asking children to seek permission before using devices, accompanying them during digital activities, limiting duration, selecting appropriate content, and encouraging children to stop when the agreed time has ended.

These practices become particularly significant when they are connected to the moral language used by the adults. The head of the RA explains that children are expected not merely to acquire technological skills but to develop *adab* when using technology, including discipline, responsibility, honesty, and *akhlak mahmudah*. Teachers similarly describe digital media as something to be used for learning rather than unrestricted entertainment, with children expected to return to direct interaction after the activity has ended. Parents extend these practices into the home and connect digital behaviour with values such as honesty, politeness, obedience to parents, responsibility, and awareness that God observes one's actions, including actions performed while using a smartphone.

These empirical practices raise a broader theoretical possibility. Digital behaviour may begin with external regulation rules established by teachers and parents but moral education seeks something beyond compliance. Through repetition, explanation, modelling, and habituation, externally imposed boundaries may become part of a child's developing understanding of appropriate conduct. From an Islamic ethical perspective, this movement from instruction toward disposition is central to the formation of *adab* and *akhlak*. The digital environment therefore provides a contemporary setting in which classical Islamic ideas of moral formation can be reconsidered.

This study explores that possibility through the concept of digital *adab*. Rather than treating the term as an established equivalent of digital ethics, the study uses it as an analytical construction developed through a dialogue between Islamic ethical thought and empirical practices in early childhood education. Digital *adab* refers here to the emerging disposition to use digital technology in an appropriate, responsible, restrained, and morally meaningful manner. It includes the ability to recognise appropriate content, follow legitimate boundaries, regulate one's engagement, avoid harmful imitation, and orient digital activity toward beneficial

purposes. The concept brings together the ethical orientation of ta'dib, the moral formation associated with akhlaq, and contemporary scholarship on children's digital behaviour.

The study asks: How are Islamic ethical values constructed and internalised in the digital behaviour of young children through practices at school and at home? It examines the roles of adult guidance, content selection, behavioural boundaries, habituation, and moral awareness in the development of children's digital conduct at RA Al-Islamiyyah Kemayoran. The study contributes to interdisciplinary Islamic studies by bringing classical Islamic ethical concepts into conversation with contemporary scholarship on digital childhood. Its central concern is not whether young children should use technology, but how they can learn to inhabit a digital environment without separating technological behaviour from moral formation.

Method

Research Design and Setting

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how Islamic ethical values are constructed and cultivated in the digital behaviour of young children. A qualitative approach was selected because the study is concerned not with measuring children's digital behaviour, but with understanding the meanings, practices, and forms of guidance through which digital conduct is shaped within an Islamic early childhood education setting. The study was conducted at RA Al-Islamiyyah Kemayoran, Central Jakarta, an Islamic early childhood institution in which digital media are incorporated into learning under adult supervision. The case was selected because its educational practices explicitly connect children's learning activities with religious values, adab, discipline, responsibility, and moral habituation.

Participants and Data Sources

The primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with the head of the RA, teachers, and parents of enrolled children. These participant groups were selected to capture the construction of digital adab across the two environments most relevant to young children's digital experiences: school and home. The head of the institution provided information concerning the school's educational orientation and policies regarding technology, while teachers described classroom practices, content selection, supervision, and children's responses to digital media. Parents provided accounts of children's gadget use at home, including rules concerning duration, content, permission, supervision, and the relationship between digital activities and religious or family routines. The use of these different sources allowed the study to examine the same phenomenon from complementary adult perspectives rather than relying on a single institutional voice.

Data Collection

The interviews explored several interconnected areas: the forms of digital media used by children; the purposes for which digital media were introduced; procedures for selecting age-appropriate and educational content; adult supervision; boundaries concerning duration and access; children's responses when digital use was interrupted; and the values communicated through these practices. Particular attention was given to practices associated with politeness, discipline, responsibility, honesty, respect for others, beneficial use of technology, and awareness that digital behaviour remains subject to Islamic moral principles. The interviews also examined how the school communicates with parents regarding children's technology use at home. The interview data were recorded in written form and organised according to participant category and thematic relevance.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed thematically through an iterative process of familiarisation, initial coding, categorisation, and thematic interpretation. The analysis began by identifying recurring descriptions of digital practices and the meanings attributed to them by participants. Related codes were then grouped into broader analytical categories, including controlled digital exposure, content selection, adult mediation, behavioural boundaries, redirection from excessive gadget use, moral habituation, and continuity between school and home. These categories were subsequently interpreted in relation to the theoretical concepts of *ta'dib*, *akhlaq*, and *muraqabah* developed in the theoretical framework. The analysis distinguishes between practices that regulate children's behaviour externally and those intended to cultivate an emerging internal orientation toward responsible digital conduct. Since the data were obtained from adult participants, the study does not claim to measure children's internalisation of these values directly; rather, it analyses how such internalisation is intentionally cultivated and recognised through adult-mediated educational practices.

Trustworthiness

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through source triangulation across the head of the RA, teachers, and parents. Statements concerning institutional orientation were compared with teachers' descriptions of classroom practices and parents' accounts of technology use in the home. Particular attention was given to convergences and differences between these accounts in order to identify patterns that extended beyond a single participant's perspective. The interpretation was also continuously compared with the conceptual framework so that the notion of digital *adab* emerged from the interaction between empirical evidence and Islamic ethical concepts rather than being imposed as a predetermined behavioural checklist.

Results and Discussion

1. Purposeful and Mediated Digital Engagement

The first finding concerns the way digital technology is positioned within children's learning experiences at RA Al-Islamiyyah Kemayoran. Across the interviews, digital media were consistently described as a supporting resource rather than the centre of children's educational activities. The head of the RA

explained that children's learning continues to rely primarily on play, storytelling, singing, practical activities, and motor engagement, while digital media are introduced selectively when they can support particular learning purposes. Technology is therefore incorporated into an already established pedagogical environment rather than becoming a substitute for direct interaction between children and teachers.

Teachers described a similar pattern in classroom practice. Digital resources were used for specific learning activities, including videos about prophets, demonstrations of ablution and prayer movements, Qur'anic recitation, Islamic songs, and simple Islamic animations. These materials were not presented as continuous entertainment or as a routine replacement for face-to-face learning. Their use depended on whether the material could assist children in understanding a particular topic or activity. This positioned digital media as an instructional aid whose relevance was determined by the learning objective rather than by the attractiveness of the technology itself.

The mediation of digital content was also evident before the material reached the children. Teachers reported reviewing videos in advance and considering the language used, age appropriateness, the absence of violent content, the presence of Islamic values, and the relevance of the material to the intended lesson. This process indicates that children's access to digital material was not treated as an unrestricted encounter with online content. Instead, the teacher functioned as a filter between the broader digital environment and the child's learning experience, determining which materials were considered appropriate for the child's developmental and educational needs.

The teacher's role did not end with selecting the material. During digital activities, teachers accompanied the children, explained the content, engaged them in simple discussion, and connected what appeared on the screen with behaviour in everyday life. Digital content was consequently embedded within interpersonal instruction. Rather than assuming that children would independently derive the intended meaning from a video or animation, teachers provided interpretation and linked the material to familiar practices and values. This pattern is significant because it shows that the educational meaning of digital media was produced through adult mediation rather than through exposure alone.

A comparable form of mediation appeared in the home environment. Parents reported allowing children to access smartphones or smart televisions primarily for educational videos, Islamic songs, hijaiyah learning, or other useful content. Access was generally supervised, and parents sought to ensure that children did not move freely from educational material to unrelated or inappropriate videos. Parents also described the use of permission-based access, indicating that children were not treated as fully autonomous users of digital devices. The home environment therefore reproduced an important feature of the school's approach: digital engagement was considered acceptable when it had a clear purpose and remained within adult guidance.

Taken together, the findings indicate that digital engagement among the children was constructed as a purposeful and mediated educational experience. The school and family did not reject digital technology, but neither did they treat access to technology as an end in itself. Digital media were selected according to educational relevance, filtered according to children's needs, accompanied by adults, and connected to activities beyond the screen. The resulting pattern suggests that children's early digital experiences at RA Al-Islamiyyah Kemayoran are shaped less by unrestricted access than by a pedagogical process in which adults determine the purpose, content, and meaning of digital encounters. This provides the empirical foundation for examining the next finding: how these mediated encounters are translated into boundaries, habituation, and responsible digital behaviour.

2. Habituation, Boundaries, and Responsible Digital Behaviour

The second finding concerns the way digital behaviour is regulated through repeated routines and behavioural boundaries. The interviews indicate that children were not simply given access to digital devices and expected to regulate their own use. Teachers and parents established recognizable patterns concerning when devices could be used, how they should be used, and when the activity should end. These boundaries were embedded within ordinary educational and family routines, making digital use part of a broader process of behavioural habituation rather than an isolated activity.

At school, digital activities were accompanied by behavioural expectations that extended beyond the content being presented on the screen. Children were encouraged to pray before learning, listen to the teacher, use digital devices in an orderly manner, avoid competing with peers, and return to other activities after the digital session. Turning off the device after learning was completed was treated as part of the activity itself. These practices indicate that the educational concern was not limited to what children learned from digital media, but also included how they behaved while participating in a digitally mediated activity.

The regulation of children's interest in gadgets was particularly visible when digital engagement became excessive. Teachers described redirecting children toward group play, drawing, building activities, worship practices, and other forms of direct engagement when they became overly interested in gadgets. The response was therefore not simply to prohibit the device, but to provide an alternative activity that could reorient the child's attention. This pattern suggests that behavioural boundaries were implemented through both limitation and redirection, allowing children to experience that stopping digital activity does not mean the end of meaningful engagement.

Similar practices were reported by parents. Children were generally required to ask permission before using a device, and gadget use was commonly placed after studying or Qur'anic learning. Parents described approximate limits on duration and established situations in which devices should not be used, including meals, bedtime, and family interaction. When the allocated time ended, children were expected to stop using the device and put it away. Parents also reported redirecting

children toward reading, memorising prayers, Qur'anic activities, family play, or other non-digital activities when children requested longer periods of gadget use. The boundaries were accompanied by explicit behavioural values. Teachers connected appropriate digital conduct with discipline, responsibility, politeness, respect for peers, and orderly participation. The head of the RA similarly emphasised that technology should be understood as an amanah and that children should learn not to imitate inappropriate behaviour encountered through digital media. The intended outcome was therefore broader than compliance with screen-time rules. Digital behaviour was placed within a moral vocabulary that included responsible use, beneficial purposes, honesty, and akhlaq mahmudah.

Parents reinforced this moral dimension in the home environment. Their accounts associated appropriate gadget use with politeness, honesty, obedience, responsibility, respect for parents, and the ability to distinguish beneficial content from behaviour that should not be imitated. One parent also described the importance of teaching children that Allah remains aware of their behaviour when they use technology. These accounts show that digital boundaries were not presented solely as external restrictions. They were accompanied by attempts to give those restrictions a moral meaning that children could gradually encounter through repeated practice.

Overall, the findings show that responsible digital behaviour was cultivated through a combination of boundaries, repetition, interruption, redirection, and moral explanation. Children were expected to follow rules concerning access and duration, but these rules were embedded within routines that connected digital behaviour with discipline, responsibility, respect, and beneficial use. The evidence does not establish that children had fully internalised these values, since the study did not directly interview the children themselves. It does, however, demonstrate that the school and families were deliberately creating repeated conditions through which responsible digital conduct could become a familiar pattern of behaviour.

3. School-Home Continuity in the Formation of Digital Adab

The third finding concerns the continuity between the school's educational practices and parental guidance at home. The interviews indicate that digital behaviour was not treated as an issue confined to the classroom. The school communicated expectations concerning children's gadget use to parents, while parents described practices that broadly reflected the behavioural and religious orientation promoted by the school. This continuity created a shared environment in which children's encounters with technology were surrounded by similar expectations concerning purpose, supervision, discipline, and appropriate conduct.

At the institutional level, the head of the RA recognised that the school could not completely control children's access to technology outside the school environment. Rather than attempting to eliminate children's exposure to gadgets at home, the school encouraged parents to provide age-appropriate content, supervise use, establish reasonable time limits, and maintain a balance between digital activities and play, learning, worship, and direct family interaction. This approach positioned parents as an important extension of the educational process and

acknowledged that children's digital behaviour is shaped across multiple environments.

The parents' accounts suggest that this communication was reflected in everyday family practices. Parents described routines in which gadget use was generally preceded by learning activities or Qur'anic study and accompanied by supervision. They also reported restrictions on gadget use during meals, before bedtime, and during family interaction. These practices were not identical in every household, but they shared a common orientation: digital devices were to remain subordinate to educational, religious, and relational activities rather than displacing them.

The continuity between school and home was also visible in the language used to describe appropriate behaviour. Both teachers and parents associated responsible digital use with politeness, discipline, respect, responsibility, and the avoidance of inappropriate imitation. At school, children were encouraged to listen, use devices in an orderly manner, respect peers, and return to non-digital activities after the learning session. At home, parents reinforced expectations concerning obedience, responsibility, respect for parents, and the selection of useful content. The recurrence of these values across the two settings indicates that digital behaviour was being incorporated into a wider pattern of moral education.

Another important element of this continuity was the connection between digital behaviour and religious consciousness. The school's educational orientation emphasised that technology should be treated as an amanah and used for beneficial purposes, while parents linked appropriate digital conduct with awareness of Allah's observation, honesty, politeness, and the avoidance of harmful behaviour. The data therefore show that digital behaviour was gradually being framed not merely as a matter of following technological rules but as part of a child's broader relationship with moral and religious obligations.

The school-home relationship also functioned as a mechanism for addressing practical tensions surrounding children's digital use. Parents acknowledged that children could request longer gadget use or become interested in content beyond what adults considered appropriate. Such situations were addressed through supervision, explanation, interruption, and redirection rather than through unrestricted access. At the same time, parents recognised that family circumstances, peer influence, and the availability of gadgets in the surrounding environment could make consistent regulation difficult. These accounts show that the formation of responsible digital behaviour takes place within an everyday social environment in which adults continually negotiate children's interests and established educational expectations.

Across the three participant groups, the data point to a process in which digital behaviour is gradually incorporated into the broader moral formation of the child. The school establishes an educational orientation, teachers translate that orientation into classroom routines, and parents extend similar expectations into the home. This does not mean that children's digital adab can be regarded as fully formed or internally established, since the study captures adult perspectives rather than

children's own accounts. What can be observed, however, is a consistent process of cultivating the conditions for such formation: digital behaviour is repeatedly connected with discipline, responsibility, respect, religious awareness, and beneficial use. In this sense, the empirical findings suggest that digital adab emerges not from a single lesson about technology but from the continuity of moral guidance across the environments in which young children encounter digital media.

Discussion

The findings suggest that digital behaviour in early childhood is shaped less by children's access to technology itself than by the social and educational conditions surrounding that access. At RA Al-Islamiyyah Kemayoran, digital media were introduced selectively, mediated by adults, and connected to particular learning purposes. This finding is consistent with research showing that young children's digital experiences are strongly influenced by adult mediation rather than occurring independently of family and educational contexts. (Nikken & Schols, 2015), for example, demonstrate that parental mediation is an important dimension of young children's media environments, while (Ata-Aktürk & Akman, 2024) show that parental mediation remains relevant to children's digital technology experiences during the 3–6 age period. The present study extends this discussion by showing that, in an Islamic early childhood setting, mediation is not limited to controlling access or reducing potential risks. It also determines the moral and educational meaning attached to children's digital encounters.

The distinction between digital access and meaningful digital engagement is particularly important in early childhood education. (Marsh et al., 2018) demonstrate that digital applications can support play and creativity among young children, while also showing that the characteristics and age-appropriateness of applications affect the quality of those experiences. (Howard et al., 2026) similarly shift attention from the mere presence of technology toward the quality of children's digital interactions and experiences in early childhood education. The practices found at RA Al-Islamiyyah reflect this orientation: videos, Qur'anic recitations, Islamic songs, and animations were considered useful when they served a clear pedagogical purpose, but they did not replace play, storytelling, direct interaction, or practical learning. (Ramadani et al., 2025) likewise identify digital media as part of Islamic early childhood education while highlighting the challenges involved in integrating technology into such settings. The significance of the present finding therefore lies not in whether technology is accepted or rejected, but in how its educational value is established through purposeful mediation.

From an Islamic educational perspective, this mediated approach can be interpreted through Al-Attas's concept of *ta'dib*. Al-Attas distinguishes *ta'dib* from education understood merely as the transmission of information, placing adab and right action within a broader order of knowledge, justice, and human formation. The practices observed in this study resonate with that orientation because children are not simply exposed to information through digital media. Teachers determine which material is appropriate, explain its meaning, and connect what is encountered on screen with conduct beyond the screen. Digital learning therefore

becomes part of a process of directing the child's relationship with knowledge, conduct, and appropriate boundaries. In this sense, adult mediation functions not merely as a protective mechanism but as an early pedagogical expression of ta'dib: guiding the child toward an appropriate way of encountering and responding to digital content.

This interpretation also helps distinguish the present argument from a purely technical understanding of digital literacy. (Suryadi et al., 2026), through a systematic review of early childhood digital literacy research, identify digital media as an increasingly important component of early literacy learning, while contemporary Islamic education scholarship has begun to address the ethical dimension of digital engagement more explicitly. (Mentari et al., 2026), for example, conceptualise Islamic digital ethics through the integration of values such as amanah, honesty, and adab with digital literacy, ethical communication, reflective learning, and behavioural evaluation. The findings of this study provide an early-childhood empirical dimension to that discussion. At RA Al-Islamiyyah, ethical formation does not begin with sophisticated digital literacy skills; it begins with seemingly simple practices such as asking permission, receiving guidance about appropriate content, listening to adults, using technology for beneficial purposes, and knowing when to stop.

The second finding, concerning boundaries and habituation, is particularly significant when read through the Islamic concept of akhlaq. The rules identified in the interviews – limited duration, permission before use, stopping when the activity ends, and redirection toward play, worship, learning, or family interaction could be interpreted superficially as ordinary forms of screen-time management. Their significance becomes different when considered alongside the moral language used by teachers and parents. Discipline, responsibility, respect, honesty, beneficial use, and avoidance of inappropriate imitation were repeatedly associated with technology use. This is consistent with recent Islamic education literature that increasingly treats digital behaviour as part of character formation rather than as a separate technical issue. (Adiyono et al., 2024), for instance, frame Islamic character education in the technological era as a response to the changing conditions in which moral formation takes place. (Choli et al., 2026) similarly connect media literacy with moral agency, responsibility, and ethical engagement, demonstrating that technological media can become a site of character formation rather than merely a source of information.

Al-Ghazali's understanding of moral formation provides a further interpretive layer. Within his ethical thought, virtuous conduct is not adequately explained by isolated acts; moral qualities become meaningful through their cultivation as dispositions and through repeated practice. The pattern identified in this study repeated instruction, behavioural boundaries, interruption, redirection, and reinforcement can therefore be understood as a process through which appropriate digital conduct is habituated. The important point is that the children are not merely told what is permissible or impermissible. They repeatedly encounter situations in which digital behaviour is connected to broader expectations concerning self-

control, responsibility, and respect. The empirical evidence does not permit a claim that these qualities have already become stable dispositions in the children. It does, however, show that the educational environment is deliberately organised to create the conditions in which such dispositions may develop.

This distinction between regulation and formation also clarifies the relationship between the present study and recent scholarship on Islamic digital ethics. (Mu'min et al., 2026) emphasise the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as educators, moral guides, and facilitators in developing students' digital ethics, while (Samhudi & Sani, 2026) describe Islamic education as a means of cultivating awareness of Islamic morality, responsible use of digital media, and critical responses to problematic digital behaviour. (Mustofa & Maulana, 2026) likewise conceptualise digital ethics as a moral, social, and spiritual responsibility that can be cultivated through Islamic educational processes. The present study brings these discussions into the early childhood context, where ethical formation operates through much simpler practices: modelling, repetition, supervised use, behavioural limits, explanation, and redirection. What changes with age is not the relevance of ethics but the pedagogical form through which ethical dispositions can initially be cultivated.

The findings also point toward a distinction between digital ethics and digital adab. Contemporary Islamic education literature frequently uses digital ethics to refer to responsible conduct in digital environments, including honesty, responsible communication, critical evaluation, and appropriate technology use. (Mukaromah et al., 2026), for example, connect digital ethics with tabayyun literacy and an Islamic epistemological orientation in responding to information in the post-truth environment. (Farida et al., 2026) similarly identify the need to negotiate the relationship between traditional Islamic authority and technologically mediated sources of information. These concerns are important, but the empirical setting of this study requires a more developmental and relational concept. Young children are not yet independent participants in complex online information environments. Their ethical formation begins earlier, through how adults teach them to approach technology, how they respond to limits, how they treat others during digital activities, and how they understand the purpose of technological use. Digital adab therefore refers here not simply to a set of rules for digital conduct, but to an emerging moral orientation expressed through appropriate purpose, restraint, responsibility, respect, and beneficial engagement with digital media.

The concept of muraqabah adds another dimension to this emerging construction. One parent explicitly connected children's digital behaviour with awareness that Allah observes their actions, including their behaviour when using technology. This finding should not be interpreted as evidence that young children have already developed a fully internalised state of muraqabah. The study does not include direct interviews with children and therefore cannot establish their subjective moral awareness. What the data do demonstrate is that adults introduce a religious rationale that can move digital regulation beyond external compliance. The child is gradually positioned as a moral agent whose conduct remains

meaningful even when the immediate rule or adult presence is not the only point of reference. In this respect, muraqabah provides a conceptual bridge between externally established boundaries and the possibility of emerging internal moral awareness.

The third finding, concerning continuity between school and home, strengthens this interpretation. The school did not attempt to treat children's digital behaviour as an issue that could be resolved entirely within the classroom. Instead, teachers communicated with parents, and parents described practices that broadly reflected the school's expectations concerning supervision, useful content, time boundaries, religious routines, and responsible use. This corresponds with the broader literature on parental mediation, which treats children's digital experiences as embedded within family practices rather than isolated individual choices. It also resonates with (Livingstone & Third, 2017) broader argument that children's lives in digital environments need to be considered through relationships among participation, protection, and children's rights rather than through technological access alone. The present case adds an Islamic educational dimension by showing that continuity across school and home can also function as a context for moral habituation.

This school-home continuity is important because young children's digital behaviour crosses institutional boundaries. A child may encounter one set of expectations at school and another at home, making the formation of consistent habits more difficult. In the present case, however, the recurrence of similar values across both settings discipline, responsibility, respect, beneficial use, and religious awareness creates a relatively coherent moral environment. The significance of this pattern is consistent with research showing that parental and educational mediation are central components of young children's digital experiences. It also extends recent Islamic digital ethics scholarship, which has generally focused on students, social media, digital literacy, or formal learning strategies rather than the early formation of digital conduct. (Mentari et al., 2026), (Mu'min et al., 2026) and (Mustofa & Maulana, 2026) all emphasise the importance of connecting digital behaviour with Islamic values, but the present findings show how such connections can begin before children become autonomous digital users.

The interdisciplinary contribution of the study lies in bringing these strands together. Research on children's digital lives has established the importance of mediation, age-appropriate content, play, creativity, and the quality of digital interaction (Livingstone & Third, 2017), (Marsh et al., 2018). Research in Islamic education has increasingly addressed digital ethics, character education, responsible technology use, and the relationship between Islamic values and digital literacy (Adiyono et al., 2024), (Samhudi & Sani, 2026). Other recent studies extend these concerns to media literacy, technological mediation, and the transformation of educational authority (Choli et al., 2026). The present study connects these discussions at the level of early childhood moral formation, where digital conduct is still being learned through adult relationships and repeated everyday practices.

Within this intersection, digital adab can be understood as an emerging ethical formation rather than a synonym for digital ethics. Its normative orientation derives

from ta'dib, which places appropriate conduct within the ordering of knowledge and action; its behavioural dimension is related to akhlaq, which emphasises the cultivation of moral dispositions through practice; and its inward orientation can be associated with muraqabah, understood here as an emerging awareness of moral accountability before God. Adult mediation provides the immediate pedagogical mechanism through which these orientations become accessible to young children, while continuity between school and home provides the social environment in which they can be repeatedly reinforced. The concept therefore does not claim that young children already possess an autonomous Islamic digital morality. Rather, it identifies the formative process through which ordinary digital routines can become connected to an Islamic conception of appropriate conduct.

The resulting interpretation can be expressed as a movement from mediated digital exposure, to habituated behavioural regulation, to emerging moral orientation. The first stage concerns what children encounter and why it is introduced; the second concerns how repeated boundaries and routines shape conduct; the third concerns the moral meanings attached to that conduct across school and home. This interpretation also responds to a limitation in existing discussions of digital literacy and digital ethics: technical competence and responsible behaviour are not necessarily the same thing. An Islamic perspective adds a concern with the kind of person being formed through repeated action. In this sense, digital adab provides a conceptual vocabulary for examining how early childhood education can connect technological practices with the formation of moral dispositions without treating technology itself as either inherently harmful or inherently beneficial.

The contribution of the study, therefore, is not a new set of screen-time rules or a prescriptive digital-use model. Its contribution is conceptual and interpretive: it shows how an Islamic ethical framework can illuminate the formation of young children's digital behaviour at a stage when moral agency is still being cultivated through adult guidance. The case of RA Al-Islamiyyah Kemayoran demonstrates that digital adab can begin with ordinary practices – selecting appropriate content, using technology for a defined purpose, observing boundaries, stopping when required, respecting others, returning to non-digital activities, and understanding technology as an amanah. These practices become ethically significant when they are connected across school and home and repeatedly interpreted through Islamic moral values. The concept of digital adab thus offers a way of understanding early digital education as simultaneously pedagogical, relational, and moral.

Conclusion

This study examined how digital adab is constructed within the digital experiences of young children at RA Al-Islamiyyah Kemayoran, Central Jakarta. The findings show that digital engagement is not treated as an autonomous activity but as a mediated educational experience shaped by teachers and parents. Digital media are introduced selectively, screened for age and educational appropriateness,

connected to specific learning purposes, and accompanied by adult guidance. This pattern demonstrates that early digital education in an Islamic setting involves more than determining whether children should use technology; it concerns how children are gradually introduced to appropriate ways of encountering and responding to digital media.

The study further demonstrates that digital adab develops through the interaction of behavioural boundaries, habituation, and moral guidance. Rules concerning permission, duration, stopping, redirection, and appropriate content are connected with broader values of discipline, responsibility, respect, honesty, beneficial use, and religious awareness. These practices are reinforced across school and home, creating continuity in the moral environment surrounding children's digital behaviour. Within the Islamic ethical framework, *ta'dib* provides the orientation toward appropriate conduct, *akhlaq* explains the importance of repeated practice in the formation of moral dispositions, while *muraqabah* points toward the possibility of an emerging awareness of moral accountability. The study does not claim that these qualities are already fully internalised by the children; rather, it demonstrates how educational practices create conditions for their gradual formation.

The study's main contribution is the conceptualisation of digital adab as an emerging Islamic ethical orientation toward digital engagement in early childhood. Digital adab should not be reduced to digital literacy or treated simply as another expression of digital ethics. It refers to the formative process through which children are guided to use digital media purposefully, exercise behavioural restraint, respect others, avoid inappropriate imitation, seek beneficial content, and understand technological use within a broader moral order. By connecting Islamic ethical thought with research on children's digital experiences, the study shows that digital education can be understood simultaneously as a technological, pedagogical, relational, and moral process. Future research could extend this framework by incorporating children's own perspectives and observing how these externally cultivated practices develop into more autonomous forms of digital moral agency.

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