

**SCHOOLS AS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND CHARACTER FORMATION  
IN THE DIGITAL ERA**Sina Anjani<sup>1</sup>, Anggun Kaila Apriani<sup>2</sup>, Aulia Rahma Qotruannada<sup>3</sup>, and Aizuddin Muhammad Faiq<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari, Ponorogo, Indonesia<sup>2</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari, Ponorogo, Indonesia<sup>3</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari, Ponorogo, Indonesia<sup>4</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari, Ponorogo, Indonesia**Corresponding Author:**

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2026**Abstract**

This study aims to investigate the role of schools as formal educational institutions in shaping students' character in the digital age. Schools serve not only as places for transferring knowledge but also as agents of socialization that instill moral values and ethics. The research approach used is a literature review by examining various relevant literature. The research findings indicate that advances in digital technology bring both opportunities and challenges to character education. On the one hand, technology can enrich the learning experience through interactive and creative media, but on the other hand, it can give rise to issues such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and decreased direct social interaction. The teacher's a liaison in the learning process that integrates technology with character values, while the school environment functions as a social system that supports the internalization of values through the curriculum. These findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of character education studies as well as practical recommendations for schools in formulating learning strategies that can combine character values with the wise use of digital technology.

**Keywords:** Character Education, Digital Era, School

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial process in shaping a person's character, values, and personality so they can live harmoniously within a community. In today's educational landscape, schools are considered social institutions purposely established to develop individual potential through structured learning methods. Schools serve not only as a place to impart knowledge but also as a social environment that facilitates students' understanding of values, norms, cooperation, and responsibilities as members of society (Solih Abdul Aziz, 1991). This perspective aligns with John Dewey's thinking, which states that education is a social process that serves to transfer experiences and cultural values to future generations (Ye & Shih, 2021). Therefore, schools play a crucial role in building students' character and preparing them for broader social life.

In today's educational context, the family serves as a child's initial learning environment. However, families have limitations in providing broader social experiences and organized learning. Schools function as formal educational institutions that collaborate with families to complement the educational process. Through interactions with teachers and classmates, students can hone social skills such as collaboration, healthy competition, empathy, and effective communication skills. Research shows that the school environment significantly contributes to the formation of students' character because it offers a richer social interaction environment than the family environment (Mariyani & Sundawa, 2025). Thus, schools act as agents of socialization, helping students absorb moral values, ethics, and social responsibility.

However, advances in digital technology in recent decades have drastically changed the educational landscape. The digital era is characterized by the development of information technology, the internet, artificial intelligence, and rapid access to vast amounts of information (Solih Abdul Aziz, 2019). These changes present both opportunities and challenges for the education system, particularly in shaping students' character. On the one hand, digital technology can enrich the learning process, making it more interactive and creative. On the other hand, mismanaged use of technology can lead to various problems, such as the spread of misinformation, cyberbullying, decreased direct social interaction, and a decline in moral values among the younger generation (Baykent, 2025). Therefore, schools must serve not only as places for academic learning, but also as institutions that actively build students' character and digital ethics.

Various studies have shown that character education is a key approach to addressing educational challenges in the digital age. Character education focuses not only on mastering knowledge but also on developing moral values such as responsibility, honesty, discipline, cooperation, and social concern. A literature review related to technology-based character education shows that the use of digital media in learning can be an effective way to instill character values, provided it is designed with an appropriate and relevant pedagogical approach (Surtinawati et al., 2026). Furthermore, the integration of character values into the learning process can be achieved through methods that focus on social activities and meaningful learning experiences for students (Mariyani & Sundawa, 2025).

From a philosophical perspective, schools play a crucial role in transmitting cultural heritage, simplifying the complexities of civilization, and creating a learning environment that supports students' moral and intellectual growth (Solih Abdul Aziz, 1991). Dewey argued that education is a means to build a democratic society through collaborative and participatory learning experiences (Donbavand, 2025). This function is increasingly significant in the digital age, where students require not only academic knowledge but also critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and ethical awareness in the use of technology. Other research also shows that strengthening character education based on cultural and religious values can be a crucial step in facing the challenges of globalization and digitalization in education (Idhar, 2025).

Furthermore, the role of teachers in education has also undergone significant changes in the digital era. Teachers are no longer merely transmitters of material, but also directors of learning, moral guides, and liaisons of values in educational situations. Research on the integration of character values into learning methods shows that teachers' pedagogical skills significantly influence the success of implementing character education in schools (Juanda & Az-Zahra, 2025). Teachers are expected to be able to link digital technology with moral values so that learning focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on the overall development of students' character. In addition to the role of teachers, the school environment also has a significant impact on student character development. A positive school atmosphere, collaborative learning systems, and healthy social interactions can help create an educational environment that supports student character development. Research on the development of character education in schools shows that the successful implementation of character education depends heavily on collaboration between the curriculum, school culture, and the involvement of all elements within the school (Trisiana et al., 2025). Therefore, schools must formulate educational strategies that emphasize not only academic achievement but also the development of students' character and personality.

From the explanation above, it is clear that although digital technology has brought many changes to the education system, the role of schools as institutions that shape character remains crucial. However, various challenges remain in integrating character education with advances in digital technology. Therefore, more in-depth research is needed on how schools can effectively fulfill their role as educational institutions and character builders in the digital era. Given these issues, the purpose of this study is to analyze the role of schools as educational institutions in shaping students' character in the digital era, and to examine how the function of schools, the role of teachers, and the educational environment can support the process of character formation in line with technological developments and the dynamics of modern society. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of studies on character education and provide practical recommendations for educational institutions in designing learning strategies that are able to integrate character values with advances in digital technology.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a library research approach. A library study is a series of activities related to data collection methods, reading, recording, and processing research materials. (Zed, 2008) This research design is descriptive-analytical, aiming to describe and analyze in depth the function of schools as educational and social institutions in character building based on relevant literature. Data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include books, articles from national and accredited scientific journals, and seminar proceedings that directly discuss the role of schools and character education in the digital era. Secondary sources include education policy reports, curriculum documents, and other supporting literature relevant to the study's focus.

Data collection techniques were conducted through documentation, namely by searching and collecting literature from various databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, Portal Garuda, and accredited journal sites such as Edukatif: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan (Educational Science Journal). Keywords used in the search included "school, character education, digital era," "transformation of school functions," and combinations of these keywords. The primary instrument in this research was the researcher herself (human instrument), who served as planner, data collector, analyst, and reporter of the research results. To maintain consistency and systematic recording, a data collection guide was used in the form of a literature synthesis sheet containing source identity, publication year, study focus, methodology, key findings, and their relevance to the research problem.

The data analysis technique used content analysis with a thematic approach. The analysis steps included: data reduction, categorization, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction was carried out by summarizing and selecting key information, and focusing it on themes that align with the problem formulation, namely the role of teachers in schools, challenges, and strategies of school teachers and the environment for integrating character education in the digital age. Categorization was carried out by grouping findings based on subthemes emerging from the literature. Data presentation was organized in narrative descriptions to facilitate understanding and interpretation. Conclusions were drawn in stages, using cross-verification between sources and theoretical triangulation to obtain valid and comprehensive findings. Data validity checking is carried out through source triangulation, namely comparing information from various different literatures, as well as peer debriefing with discussions with colleagues to minimize subjectivity and ensure that interpretations are in accordance with the scientific context.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **The Role of Schools as Formal Educational Institutions in Shaping Student Character in the Digital Era**

Education is a collaborative effort between the family as the primary environment and the school as the primary intentional factor. Although schools are artificial instruments compared to the family, these institutions successfully fulfill specialized functions that families cannot perform alone, particularly in providing professional supervision and a social environment free from the sometimes excessive parental affection. At school, students find the right community to interact, share emotions, and compete healthily with peers (Solih Abdul Aziz, 1999).

Discussing the role of schools as formal educational institutions in shaping student character in the digital age is a key foundation before entering into a broader transformation of school functions. Schools are no longer simply places for transferring knowledge, but also serve as the primary bulwark in instilling character values amidst the overwhelming flow of digital information that is difficult to contain (Afya et al., 2026). Based on the results of the literature review, it was found that the role of schools has undergone a significant shift along with the penetration of technology into students' lives.

The digital era poses serious challenges for student character formation. The biggest challenge to character education in the digital era is the overwhelming negative influence of social media, cyberbullying, and technology addiction, which significantly disrupt students' moral development (Fajriyah et al., 2025). This situation is exacerbated by over-reliance on technology and reduced face-to-face interaction. Therefore, schools must respond by creating spaces that foster tangible goodness, rather than simply teaching abstract moral concepts. An adaptive and comprehensive approach from all stakeholders is essential to ensure that character values remain firmly embedded amidst moral disruption (Sagala et al., 2024). In this context, schools act as filters, not only filtering information but also guiding students toward noble values rooted in national and religious culture. Recent research shows that without appropriate intervention, continuous exposure to negative content can shape thought patterns and behaviors that conflict with expected character values (Nabila et al., 2023). Therefore, schools need to develop curricular and extracurricular strategies that explicitly equip students with critical skills in responding to digital content. Systematic character internalization is achieved through an integrated curriculum structure, encompassing intracurricular activities, co-curricular activities such as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, and extracurricular activities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022). Careful planning, such as creating comfortable reading spaces and scheduled reading programs, is a determining factor in the effectiveness of 21st-century literacy and numeracy-based character education

(Santoso & Siregar, 2024). Schools are not only places of learning but also value laboratories where students directly experience the process of internalizing character through positive routines. Furthermore, integrating character values into subjects, such as linking history material to heroism or science lessons to academic honesty, strengthens students' understanding that character is not a separate entity from knowledge (Zubaedi, 2013). A consistent school culture, such as greetings, communal worship, and mutual cooperation, helps create an ecosystem that supports character development.

Transforming character values into communicative and contextual media is an urgent need in the digital age. Generation Z has unique characteristics in interacting with technology, making it crucial to understand how technology influences the formation of their moral values (Laka, 2024). Technology-based character education has been shown to increase students' awareness of social responsibility and integrity, although significant obstacles remain: approximately 40% of students struggle to effectively manage technology use, resulting in poor self-discipline (Sulistiyaningrum & Tanjungpura, 2024). Therefore, substantial digital literacy, beyond mere technical skills, must be integrated into the curriculum, encompassing ethical management of social media and information (Samukroni et al., 2024). Schools are obligated to guide students to become intelligent and characterful technology users, not merely passive consumers. Programs such as positive content creation, anti-online bullying campaigns, and discussions on media ethics provide concrete examples of how schools can develop character in the digital realm. With this approach, technology is no longer viewed as a threat, but rather as a tool for spreading good values.

The success of character education ultimately depends on the role models set demonstrated by educators and school leaders. Building character, including discipline and responsibility, requires figures who consistently provide concrete examples, not just verbal instructions (Nabila et al., 2023). If students witness teachers with integrity, fairness, and humility, these values will more easily be ingrained in them. A holistic approach involving all school components, from the principal, teachers, administrative staff, to peers, is a key prerequisite for effective character education (Zubaedi, 2013). National policy also encourages strengthening digital literacy as part of character education, as digital literacy encompasses not only technical skills but also the development of ethics, mental resilience, and critical awareness (Commission X of the Indonesian House of Representatives, 2024). Schools thus transform into centers of culture and personality that fortify students against the negative currents of digitalization. In practice, role models can also be expanded through peer mentoring programs, where senior students serve as models for juniors in good behavior, both in the real world and online. Thus, the role of schools as formal educational institutions in shaping students' character in the digital age is multidimensional. Schools serve not only as places of learning, but also as moral bulwarks, agents of value internalization, facilitators of digital literacy, and centers of role models. These four roles must be carried out simultaneously and in an integrated manner to ensure that character-building efforts are not eroded by the increasingly rapid digital tide. Close collaboration between schools, families, and communities is key to success, given that character building is not a task that schools can shoulder alone (Sahputra et al., 2026).

### **Challenges Faced by Schools in Integrating Character Education with the Development of Digital Technology**

The most important component of education is character, which serves as a framework for fostering moral, ethical, and emotional values in students (Solih Abdul Aziz, 1991). Literacy focused on digital technology is crucial for developing character education today. Digital literacy refers to a person's ability to utilize, evaluate, and actively engage in the digital world. The development of digital technology has transformed the way people obtain and

process information. Skills in digital information are crucial for ensuring a person can assess authentic information and avoid misinformation (John et al., 2026).

In today's era of globalization, access to technology has become increasingly easy for all, both adults and children. Technology currently plays a crucial role in the education sector, providing substantial support for the learning process and enhancing knowledge (Rohid et al., 2026). Furthermore, technology also serves as a means of communication between teachers and students. However, it is important to recognize that technology has both positive and negative effects on education. One example of its negative effects is incidents such as cyberbullying, clashes between students, and sexual violence against children, which demonstrate weaknesses in the nation's character (Farid, 2023).

Character education in the digital age faces various difficult challenges due to technological advances and rapid social change. Some challenges that must be addressed in character education in the digital age include balance, safety and security, and cyberbullying. First, the aspect of balance requires educators to understand the impact of technology in the past, present, and potential future. A balanced approach is needed between opportunity and responsibility, power and caution, the fulfillment of individual and group interests, and the overall well-being of the world. Many individuals exhibit behaviors that reflect excessive use of technology.

Second, the aspect of safety and security requires teachers to be fully aware that online actions can harm themselves or others. Safety and security issues include protecting personal privacy, respecting the privacy of others, and detecting inappropriate online sites (such as sexual material and other resources not intended for children).

Third, regarding cyberbullying, teachers need to be aware of the negative effects that online bullying can have and how it contradicts ethical values such as personal integrity, empathy, and responsible behavior. Cyberbullying, whether in school or outside, through technological devices, makes the privacy of children or adolescents the targets of constant attacks. Both those who receive bullying and those who perpetrate it also become victims of various forms of online abuse (such as cyberbullying, sending explicit messages, trolling, and happy slapping) that disrupt their mental and personal development (Triyanto, 2020).

### **Strategies of Schools, Teachers, and the Educational Environment in Integrating Character Education with the Development of Digital Technology**

In modern education, schools are not merely places to impart knowledge but also social institutions that contribute to the character development of the next generation. Consistent with the traditional view of schools as partners with families in education, schools function as structured environments with clear goals to hone the intellectual, social, and moral potential of students (Solih Abdul Aziz, 1991). In this regard, schools serve as tools for transmitting cultural and civilizational values to future generations and preparing them for active participation in social life (Mason, 2017). John Dewey emphasized that schools are small representations of society, providing students with opportunities to learn through social experiences and interactions with their environment. Therefore, schools' approaches to integrating character education in the digital age need to link the development of moral values with the wise use of technology, so that the learning process is oriented not only toward cognitive intelligence but also toward the formation of responsible and ethical character in the use of digital technology (Peters & Jandrić, 2017).

In the context of increasingly rapid digital technology development, schools' plans to integrate character education must be carried out in a planned manner through the curriculum, policies, and institutional culture. Schools need to create a learning environment that supports the positive use of technology, such as through instruction focused on digital citizenship, digital literacy skills, and ethical use of social media (Harrison & Laco, 2022). This strategy aligns with the role of schools as institutions that simplify the complexities of human

civilization so that students can gradually understand them, as proposed by Dewey's concept of progressive education. In other words, digital technology should be viewed as a tool to enrich the learning experience, not simply as a medium for conveying information. Research shows that the combination of digital technology integration and character education can improve students' critical thinking skills, social empathy, and moral responsibility in the digital world (Karatsiori, 2023). Furthermore, schools also need to design policies that regulate the safe and ethical use of technology, so that students not only become skilled in the digital world but also develop moral awareness in its use.

The role of teachers in this approach is crucial because they are the primary link between technology, moral values, and student learning. In the context of digital education, teachers function not only as material deliverers but also as facilitators, assisting students in understanding ethical values and social responsibility in the digital space (Dewi & Alam, 2020). Teachers need digital pedagogical skills that enable them to incorporate character values into technology-based learning, through the use of online learning platforms, digital collaborative projects, and ethical reflection on technology use. Research shows that the success of character education in the digital era depends heavily on teachers' ability to design learning experiences that integrate technology with the instillation of moral values, such as academic honesty, responsibility, and cooperation (Nurbayan & Sanusi, 2025). Furthermore, teachers also act as role models in the ethical use of technology, as their attitudes toward technology will serve as examples for students in shaping their views on digital technology.

Beyond educational institutions and educators, the broader learning environment also plays a crucial role in integrating character education with digital technology. The learning environment encompasses interactions between schools, families, and communities, which work together to build an educational ecosystem that fosters the development of students' character (Solih Abdul Aziz, 2019). In the previous section, it was explained that schools offer a social environment that allows students to socialize with friends, learn to cooperate, compete healthily, and share emotional experiences. This social environment forms an important foundation for character development, as through these interactions, students acquire values such as tolerance, responsibility, and solidarity (Rahayu et al., 2023). In the digital era, this environment extends to cyberspace, where social interactions also take place through digital platforms. Therefore, character education must consider the dynamics of digital interactions that impact student behavior, including communication ethics, digital security, and responsibility in sharing information (Cholifah, 2024).

Furthermore, the digital educational environment needs to be oriented to support the cleansing function described. explained in the concept of traditional education, namely creating an atmosphere free from negative societal influences. In the digital context, this means schools should equip students with the skills to filter information, identify misinformation, and avoid negative impacts such as cyberbullying, digital radicalism, or technology misuse (Nurhayati et al., 2025). Combining character education with digital literacy is an important step to ensure that technology is used as a tool for moral and intellectual development, not as a source of moral decay. Research shows that a character education approach combined with digital citizenship education can increase students' ethical awareness in using technology and strengthen the values of tolerance and social responsibility (Herak, 2025).

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## CONCLUSION

In the digital era, schools continue to play a fundamental role as formal educational institutions and as character builders for students. While technology offers significant opportunities for enriching learning, it also presents serious challenges such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and a decline in direct social interaction. Therefore, schools must function as moral bulwarks, agents of value internalization, facilitators of digital literacy, and centers of role modeling. Teachers play a crucial role as a bridge between technology and character values, while the school environment serves as a social ecosystem that instills values through the curriculum, school culture, and daily interactions.

Effective strategies include integrating character values into subjects, strengthening digital literacy, implementing ethical technology policies, and implementing creative programs such as positive content campaigns and peer mentoring. The success of character education in the digital era depends on close collaboration between schools, families, and communities, as well as consistent role models from all educational components. With a holistic approach, technology is no longer a threat but rather a means to strengthen students' moral values, ethics, and social responsibility.

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