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Transforming the Role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Teachers in Responding to Changes in Student Character in the Digital Era

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Abstract

Purpose : Digitalization has changed how students learn, interact, and encounter religious authority, which challenges the character-building mission of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. This article examines how the roles of PAI teachers are being reconfigured in response to reported changes in student character, and proposes a conceptual framework that links these changes, the conditions that enable or constrain teachers, and six role shifts.

Method : The study is a narrative-integrative literature review with thematic analysis of 18 journal articles published in 2024–2026 (15 primary SINTA-accredited studies and three comparator studies), supplemented by legislation and Qur'anic verses. Studies were selected against explicit inclusion criteria, extracted into a synthesis matrix, and analyzed around four research questions.

Results : The reviewed studies report weaker self-regulation, shifting attitudes and values, reduced moral sensitivity, and exposure to religious content of unclear authority, but none tests a causal link between digital media use and character change. Teachers face constraints at three levels: the teacher (digital literacy, teaching habits), the school (infrastructure, the normative nature of PAI content), and the environment (limited family collaboration). Evidence on teachers' digital competence conflicts: contextual studies report gaps, whereas a national survey of 12,002 teachers reports generally high competence. Six role shifts are identified: digital role model; facilitator and curator of religious content; religious digital literacy educator; spiritual mentor and character counselor; learning innovator; and family and community partner.

Conclusion : The framework adds an explanatory chain from reported character concerns to enabling conditions, teacher roles, and intended character outcomes, grounded in Lickona's character components, social learning theory, TPACK, and Islamic educational principles, and states it as seven testable propositions. It does not change the aim of Islamic education but renews its means. Because it is a conceptual synthesis that has not been empirically validated, field, quasi-experimental, and instrument-development studies are needed to test it.

Keywords: Islamic education; teacher roles; digital literacy; moral education; conceptual framework; literature review

1. Introduction

Digital technology has changed almost every aspect of human life, including education. It opens opportunities for improving literacy, creativity, and innovation, but it also challenges the formation of students' morals and character (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025). Students today grow up with digital devices, social media, and almost unlimited access to information, so their patterns of learning and interaction differ from those of earlier cohorts (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024). The popular label *digital natives* (Prensky, 2001) is contested, however, and is used here only descriptively (see section 4.5).

Indonesia's national education goals state that education aims to develop learners who are faithful, devout to God Almighty, and of noble character (Republik Indonesia, 2003, Article 3). Against this aim, the studies reviewed in this article report signs of weakening religious values among students, such as declining discipline, fading respect for teachers and parents, and more consumerist and individualistic behavior, and they describe social media as a weakly supervised space in which students meet content that conflicts with religious and cultural norms (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 82). These are reported observations; as section 4.5 discusses, the studies do not establish that digital media cause them.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers occupy a strategic position in this situation. PAI is not only a means of transferring religious knowledge but also a process of internalizing values, forming habits, and developing moral awareness, and teachers are expected to act as role models, mentors, facilitators, communicators, and evaluators (Amin, 2026). Not all teachers are equally ready for these demands: readiness to integrate technology, limited infrastructure, and the strong habit of lecture-based teaching remain obstacles in the field (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, pp. 29–30).

Recent studies show both sides of this picture. Technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI) offer opportunities for engagement, accessibility, and interactivity, but their use carries risks of weakening moral values, declining religious literacy, and technological dependence (Muslim, 2024). Qualitative research on teacher competence and implementation models in secondary schools indicates that the digital transformation of PAI learning is not yet optimal (Mintasih et al., 2024), and the problems extend to learning motivation, technological innovation, and teacher professionalism (Hasanah & Misbah, 2025).

The framework proposed in this article draws on four lenses, each of which answers a different question (Table 1). Together they divide the analytical work: the Islamic educational lens specifies what teachers are responsible for and the limits on how they may act; character education theory specifies which components of character a role should develop; social learning theory and TPACK specify how a role might influence students and what knowledge allows teachers to enact it.

Table 1. Analytical Lenses Used in the Framework

Lens	Main sources	Question it answers in this article
Islamic educational functions and principles	*Mu'allim*, *murabbi*, *mursyid*, *uswah hasanah* (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025); QS. Al-Ahzab: 21; Al-Hujurat: 6; An-Nahl: 125; At-Tahrim: 6	What is the teacher responsible for, and what limits does Islamic education set on how roles are exercised?
Character education	Lickona (1991)	Which component of character (knowing, feeling, action) should a role develop?
Social learning theory	Bandura (1977, 1999)	Through which learning mechanism (modeling, moral disengagement) might a role influence students?
TPACK and teacher beliefs	Mishra & Koehler (2006); Ertmer et al. (2012)	What knowledge and beliefs allow a teacher to enact the role with technology?

Source: Author's analysis (2026).

Lickona (1991) views character as a unity of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*, which must be developed together so that values do not stop at cognitive understanding. Bandura (1977)

explains that students learn behavior by observing models, so teacher role modeling is a learning mechanism and not only moral encouragement. Bandura (1999) also describes *moral disengagement*, the selective deactivation of moral control, which earlier studies used to explain how exposure to negative content may dull moral sensitivity (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 84). TPACK emphasizes the integration of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006); it is relevant because PAI content is value-laden and normative (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 33), so mastery of tools alone is insufficient, and because teachers' pedagogical beliefs shape how they use technology in the classroom (Ertmer et al., 2012). The Islamic educational lens rests on the functions of the PAI teacher as *mu'allim* (educator), *murabbi* (spiritual guide), and *uswah hasanah* (good role model) (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 82), to which Abuddin Nata adds *mursyid* (moral guide; as cited in Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 84), and on four Qur'anic principles used as evaluative criteria for the roles (section 4.3).

In this article, *character* follows Lickona (1991) as a unity of moral knowledge, feeling, and action. *Religious digital literacy* is the ability to understand, evaluate, and use digital media on the basis of Islamic values (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 84). *Role transformation* is the shift and expansion of the functions of PAI teachers in responding to changes in student character, not a replacement of their classical functions.

Earlier studies tend to highlight a single aspect: the role of teachers in character formation, learning media and technology integration, or teacher professionalism and its problems (Table 3). Three recent studies come closest to an integrated view. Masfufah and Sholicha (2026) propose six competence pillars for fostering students' digital morals, Muksin and Afandi (2025) review digital ethics in PAI, and Oviyanti et al. (2026) survey PAI teachers' digital competence. Three questions remain insufficiently answered: how specific concerns about student character call for specific changes in what PAI teachers do, under which conditions teachers can enact those changes, and through which learning mechanisms the changes might affect students' character. Competence models describe what teachers should be able to do; by themselves they do not explain why a given role matters for a given concern, or why the same competence produces different practice in different schools.

This article therefore answers four research questions.

1. How are the concept and basic role of PAI teachers understood in Islamic education?
2. How is student character reported to change in the digital era?
3. What challenges do PAI teachers face in the digital era?
4. What forms does the transformation of PAI teachers' roles take, and what conceptual framework links these roles to character concerns, enabling conditions, and intended outcomes?

The contribution is a conceptual framework, not a new empirical finding. The framework (a) links reported character concerns to six role shifts, (b) specifies enabling conditions at the teacher, school, and family-policy levels, (c) connects each role to a character component, a learning mechanism, and an Islamic educational principle, and (d) states each link as a testable proposition. It is an integrative synthesis of existing theories and reviewed evidence; its original element is the proposed linkage and the propositions, which have not been empirically validated. Section 4.1 explains how the framework relates to the competence model of Masfufah and Sholicha (2026).

2. Method

Study Design

This study is a narrative literature review of an integrative kind, which combines findings from different studies to build a new conceptual framework rather than to estimate the size of an

effect (Snyder, 2019). It is descriptive-analytical and organized as library research. Its aim is conceptual synthesis, and it does not claim exhaustive coverage of the literature.

Search, Selection, and Corpus

Table 2 sets out the selection criteria and the justification for the corpus. The primary corpus consists of 15 SINTA-accredited journal articles published in 2024–2026 that address the role of PAI teachers, student character, or technology integration in PAI learning. Three comparator studies were added to test the synthesis against recent work that approaches the topic from digital competence and ethics: Masfufah and Sholicha (2026), Muksin and Afandi (2025), and Oviyanti et al. (2026). They were selected because each addresses PAI teachers' digital competence or digital moral and ethical education directly, and because they differ in design (a qualitative literature review, a systematic review, and a national survey), which makes it possible to examine convergence and contradiction. The comparators were used to test the synthesis, not to generate its themes. Legislation and Qur'anic verses provide the normative foundation, and the theoretical sources in section 1.1 provide the analytical lenses; neither is counted in the corpus.

Table 2. Selection Criteria and Justification of the Corpus

Element	Specification
Sources	SINTA-accredited Indonesian journal articles (primary corpus); recent comparator studies on PAI teachers' digital competence and digital ethics
Search focus	PAI teachers; student character and moral formation; technology integration in PAI learning in the digital era
Period	Publications from 2024 to 2026
Inclusion criteria	Peer-reviewed journal article; SINTA-accredited (primary corpus); published 2024–2026; Indonesian context; addresses (a) the role or competence of PAI teachers, (b) student character or moral and religious formation, or (c) technology integration in PAI learning
Exclusion criteria	Not about PAI or Islamic education; none of foci (a)–(c); not SINTA-accredited (primary corpus); published outside 2024–2026
Justification of the 15 primary studies	Together they cover the three foci in the inclusion criteria and the secondary, vocational, and higher education levels, so that role, character, and technology perspectives can be compared
Justification of the three comparators	Each addresses teachers' digital competence or digital moral and ethical education directly and differs in design (qualitative review, systematic review, national survey); used to test convergence and contradiction, not to generate themes

Source: Author's analysis (2026).

Data Extraction and Analysis

Analysis followed the logic of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in five steps. First, for each study the following were extracted into a synthesis matrix: context and focus, reported character changes, challenges, roles or strategies, and recommendations. Second, extracted segments were coded against four a priori questions that correspond to the research questions, and further codes were added inductively. Third, codes were grouped into themes; for example, codes for weak concentration and gadget dependence were grouped as self-regulation and social interaction, and codes for unverified online sermons and misinformation as sources and content of religious information. Fourth, themes were reviewed against the extracted data and renamed where needed. Fifth, themes were interpreted through the four lenses in Table 1, and findings were

compared across studies to identify agreement, divergence, and gaps, with the comparator studies treated separately so that contradictions remained visible.

Quality, Traceability, and Ethics

Every factual statement is linked to its source, with page numbers when it comes from a particular part of an article. Interpretations by the authors, such as theme groupings, the mapping of roles to character components, and the propositions, are marked as the author's analysis so that readers can distinguish them from the findings of earlier studies. The review did not apply a formal quality-appraisal instrument and does not follow a fully documented systematic review protocol; its implications are discussed in section 4.6. The study involves no human participants and uses only published sources, so it does not require ethical approval.

3. Results

The results are organized around the four research questions, preceded by a profile of the corpus and followed by a cross-study synthesis.

Corpus Profile

Table 3 lists the 18 studies. The 15 primary studies were published in 2024 (n = 7), 2025 (n = 7), and 2026 (n = 1); with the three comparators, the corpus comprises seven studies from 2024, eight from 2025, and three from 2026. By primary focus (author's analysis), four primary studies concern teacher roles and student character, seven concern learning media and technology, three concern professionalism and teacher challenges, and one concerns a project-based learning model. The studies are set mainly in secondary and vocational schools or are literature reviews; one is at the higher education level (Choli et al., 2024), and none addresses primary education.

Table 3. Summary of Reviewed Studies

Author (Year)	Journal	Key findings
Safiqo & Ghofur (2025)	Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam	PAI teachers act as *mu'allim*, *uswah hasanah*, and *murabbi*; main obstacles are teachers' low digital literacy and weak control over gadgets.
Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah (2024)	Muaddib	Video media are still used to a limited extent; obstacles are teacher readiness, infrastructure, and the normative character of PAI material.
Fadhilah & Budiyono (2025)	Muaddib	Integration of information technology media in vocational high schools proceeds systematically and strengthens religiosity (cognitive, affective, practical).
Amin (2026)	An-Nur	PAI as a process of value internalization; teachers as role models, mentors, facilitators, communicators, and evaluators.
Salisah et al. (2024)	Al-Fikr	Literature review on the role of PAI in shaping student character in the digital era.
Mintasih et al. (2024)	Jurnal Pendidikan Islam	Teacher competence and implementation models of digital technology in secondary schools; transformation not yet optimal.
Sukmawati et al. (2025)	Jurnal Ilmiah Profesi Pendidikan	PAI teachers' readiness to use ICT covers competence, challenges, and solution strategies.

Author (Year)	Journal	Key findings
Samiuddin et al. (2025)	Qiro'ah	Teacher professionalism in the era of disruption needs holistic strengthening: digital competence, religious moderation, innovation, and policy.
Mahesa et al. (2025)	Tsaqofah	PAI teachers as role models, mentors, and facilitators who combine Islamic values with digital literacy.
Muslim (2024)	Scaffolding	AR and AI open learning opportunities but pose risks to moral values and religious literacy.
Choli et al. (2024)	Edukasi Islami	Digitalization of PAI learning in higher education through online platforms, multimedia content, and interactive applications.
Hasanah & Misbah (2025)	Qalam	Problems of PAI in the digital era relate to motivation, technological innovation, and teacher professionalism.
Nijo et al. (2024)	At-Turots	Adaptation of PAI learning through digital technology.
Al Mubarok & Saputra (2025)	Al-Mudarris	Project-based learning increases creativity and religious values among vocational students.
Ulum & Hasyim (2024)	Al-Musannif	Challenges of PAI teachers in dealing with Generation Z students in vocational secondary schools.
Masfufah & Sholicha (2026)†	al-Afkar	Qualitative literature review with thematic synthesis: teachers shift from normative instructors to facilitators and moral role models; six competence pillars are proposed to foster students' digital morals.
Muksin & Afandi (2025)†	Maharot	Systematic review (PRISMA 2020; 28 articles from 327 records) of digital ethics in PAI; challenges are teacher literacy, curriculum relevance, and insufficiently contextual pedagogy.
Oviyanti et al. (2026)†	Jurnal Keprofesian Guru Keagamaan	Quantitative descriptive survey of 12,002 PAI teachers; digital technology competence is generally high after the Teacher Professional Program.

Note: † marks the three comparator studies. Source: Author's analysis (2026).

The Basic Role of PAI Teachers (RQ1)

In Islamic education, PAI teachers hold several functions at once: educator (*mu'allim*), spiritual guide (*murabbi*), and good role model (*uswah hasanah*) (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 82), with the additional function of *mursyid* (as cited in Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 84). Their task therefore extends beyond delivering religious knowledge to fostering morals and spiritual awareness. In Lickona's terms, students should not only understand Islamic teachings cognitively but also internalize and practice them (as cited in Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 82).

Law Number 14 of 2005 requires teachers to have pedagogical, personality, social, and professional competence (Republik Indonesia, 2005, Article 10 paragraph 1). For PAI teachers, these competences combine with moral role modeling rooted in the example of the Prophet Muhammad

(peace be upon him) (QS. Al-Ahzab: 21; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, n.d.). In the digital era, recent studies position PAI teachers as role models, mentors, facilitators, communicators, and evaluators in the process of value internalization (Amin, 2026), and they add demands for digital competence, religious moderation, innovative learning, and policy support (Samiuddin et al., 2025; Sukmawati et al., 2025). The two sets of expectations are complementary: the legal competences provide a measurable standard, and the Islamic functions give that standard a direction of values (author's analysis).

Reported Changes in Student Character (RQ2)

The studies report six character-related concerns, which can be grouped into three clusters (author's analysis). The first cluster concerns *self-regulation and social interaction*: the digital generation is quick to access information and open to change but tends to lack self-control and concentration (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 84), and excessive gadget use is associated with less face-to-face interaction (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 88). The second concerns *values and moral sensitivity*: declining discipline, fading respect for teachers and parents, and more consumerist and individualistic behavior (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 82), together with reduced moral sensitivity, which repeated exposure to hate speech, verbal violence, and consumerist behavior on social media may produce through moral disengagement (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 84). The third concerns the *sources and content of religious information*: many students obtain religious knowledge from social media and online sermons whose scholarly authority is unclear, which risks narrow or extreme understandings (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 82), and misinformation and negative content may damage morals (Salisah et al., 2024, as cited in Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 29). The clusters matter because they call for different kinds of response: the first relates to habits, the second to value internalization, and the third to the ability to evaluate sources.

These concerns are reported rather than tested; section 4.5 discusses what this means for how they should be read. The studies also stress that digital technology brings opportunities for literacy, creativity, and innovation, and provides learning media that can help instill discipline, responsibility, empathy, and integrity (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 29; Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 81). Finally, students who are used to interacting with technology tend to be less suited to conventional methods, and the mismatch can reduce the effectiveness of PAI learning (Fadhilah & Budiyono, 2025, p. 126); teaching Generation Z students in vocational schools is an issue in its own right (Ulum & Hasyim, 2024). Character change is thus also a change in how students learn, interact, and make sense of values.

Challenges of PAI Teachers (RQ3)

The challenges reported in the studies operate at three levels (author's analysis). At the *teacher level*, not all PAI teachers have adequate technical skills and confidence, so some still rely on lectures (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, pp. 32–33; Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 87). Digital media often serve only as a supplement while lectures remain the main method, and some teachers are reluctant to change because the benefits of technology are uncertain to them (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, pp. 31, 33–34; Fadhilah & Budiyono, 2025, p. 126).

At the *school and content level*, uneven internet access and a lack of devices hinder the use of technology (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 33). Material that requires deep understanding of religious norms is difficult to deliver through video alone without adequate interaction (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 33), and successful integration depends not only on devices but also on school culture and teachers' readiness to manage technology pedagogically (Fadhilah & Budiyono, 2025, pp. 126–127). At the *environmental level*, many parents leave moral education entirely to the school, although forming religious character requires synergy among family, school, and social environment, and students are exposed to a hedonistic and individualistic digital environment (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 87). Because several of these challenges lie beyond teachers'

control, it would be unfair to place the burden of role transformation on teachers alone (author's analysis).

The comparator studies add two perspectives. A systematic review of 28 articles from 327 records reports that digital ethics learning is hindered by limited teacher digital literacy, curriculum content that is less relevant to contemporary issues, and insufficiently contextual pedagogical approaches (Muksin & Afandi, 2025), and another review reports gaps in digital literacy, a psychological burden on teachers, and weak systematic institutional support (Masfufah & Sholicha, 2026). In contrast, a survey of 12,002 primary and secondary PAI teachers in urban and rural areas reports that teachers' digital technology competence is generally high after the Teacher Professional Program (Oviyanti et al., 2026). This conflict is examined in section 4.4.

Role Shifts and Enabling Strategies (RQ4)

The reviewed studies describe six shifts in the role of PAI teachers (Table 4). The comparator evidence points in the same direction: from normative instructor to facilitator and moral role model in the digital world (Masfufah & Sholicha, 2026). Grouping the roles by the character concern that each mainly addresses is the author's analysis.

Table 4. Six Role Shifts of PAI Teachers and the Practices Reported in the Literature

Role shift	Character concern addressed	Practices reported in the literature	Main sources
From content deliverer to **digital role model**	Self-regulation; moral sensitivity	Courteous speech in messaging groups, wisdom on social media, not spreading unverified information; consistent discipline, patience, honesty, and courtesy	Safiqo & Ghofur (2025, pp. 84, 86, 88); Mahesa et al. (2025)
From main source to **facilitator and curator of religious content**	Sources and content of religious information	Guiding students to distinguish valid from misleading sources; accompanying students in examining, discussing, and reflecting on religious content; shifting from teacher-centered to student-centered learning	Safiqo & Ghofur (2025, pp. 82, 87); Fadhilah & Budiyono (2025, pp. 129–131); Amin (2026)
Religious digital literacy educator	Sources and content of religious information	Discussion of hoax cases and media ethics; critical evaluation of online religious content; recognizing credible Islamic sources	Safiqo & Ghofur (2025, p. 84); Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah (2024, p. 30); Fadhilah & Budiyono (2025, p. 132); Muksin & Afandi (2025)
Spiritual mentor and character counselor	Values and moral sensitivity	Personal and religious counseling that begins with listening; personal dialogue; digital works with Islamic messages	Safiqo & Ghofur (2025, p. 87); Fadhilah & Budiyono (2025, pp. 131–132)

Role shift	Character concern addressed	Practices reported in the literature	Main sources
Learning innovator	Self-regulation and engagement; mismatch of methods and learners	Platforms such as Google Classroom, YouTube, Kahoot, and digital Qur'an applications; blended learning and flipped classroom; video combined with quizzes, discussion, and simulation; digital project-based learning	Safiqo & Ghofur (2025, pp. 82, 85, 86); Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah (2024, pp. 32–35); Fadhilah & Budiyono (2025, pp. 128–129, 132); Al Mubarok & Saputra (2025); Choli et al. (2024)
Family and community partner	Gadget dependence; hedonistic and individualistic environment	Guidance of technology use at home; Islamic parenting programs; teacher–parent communication forums and regular communication	Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah (2024, p. 30); Safiqo & Ghofur (2025, pp. 83, 89)

Note: The grouping of roles by character concern is the author's analysis. Source: Author's analysis (2026).

The strategies proposed to support these roles also operate at three levels. At the teacher level, studies call for systematic and sustained digital competence training that covers technical and pedagogical aspects, through professional mentoring and collaboration among schools (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 34; Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 89). At the school level, they call for stable internet access and adequate devices (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 34), habituation and integration of character values through prayer, congregational prayer, Qur'an recitation, and role modeling (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, pp. 83, 89), and ethical guidelines for technology use, including supervision of digital content (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 30). At the family and policy level, they call for regular school–parent communication about students' behavior and digital activities (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 89), government teacher training, an adaptive PAI curriculum, and research on the effectiveness of digital learning models for religious character (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 35; Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 89). The comparator studies emphasize policy: reform of teacher education curricula and professional development for religious educators (Masfufah & Sholicha, 2026) and curriculum strengthening, teacher training, and technology-based Islamic learning media (Muksin & Afandi, 2025). These strategies are consistent with the call to strengthen professionalism holistically (Samiuddin et al., 2025) and to align a technology-based curriculum with religious knowledge and science (Muslim, 2024).

Cross-Study Synthesis

Table 5 compares what the studies agree on and where they diverge or qualify one another. Two features of the evidence base matter for what follows. First, it is concentrated: three studies (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025; Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024; Fadhilah & Budiyono, 2025) account for 80 of the 130 citations to the 18 reviewed studies in the main text (excluding Table 3), so some statements rest on few sources. Second, it is descriptive: as summarized in Table 3, none of the studies reports a test of whether the proposed roles improve students' character.

Table 5. Synthesis of Substantive Findings across Studies

Theme	Where the studies converge	Where they diverge or qualify	Main sources
Teacher role	Teachers remain central; the role extends from delivering knowledge to modeling, mentoring, and facilitating	Emphasis differs: moral risks and role modeling; conditions of media use; competence and professionalism	Amin (2026); Mahesa et al. (2025); Safiqo & Ghofur (2025); Masfufah & Sholicha (2026)
Character change	Concern about self-control, discipline, respect, moral sensitivity, and religious content of unclear authority	Evidence is descriptive; no causal test; technology also offers opportunities for value instillation	Safiqo & Ghofur (2025); Salisah et al. (2024); Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah (2024); Muslim (2024)
Challenges	Digital literacy, infrastructure, teaching habits, family collaboration, curriculum relevance	A national survey reports generally high teacher competence, whereas field studies and two reviews report gaps	Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah (2024); Safiqo & Ghofur (2025); Muksin & Afandi (2025); Masfufah & Sholicha (2026); Oviyanti et al. (2026)
Roles and strategies	Modeling, facilitation, digital literacy, and collaboration with parents; training and policy support	The normative nature of PAI content limits video-only delivery; strategies range from teacher-level training to holistic and policy-level reform	Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah (2024); Samiuddin et al. (2025); Masfufah & Sholicha (2026); Muksin & Afandi (2025)
Evidence base	Studies are set mainly in secondary and vocational schools	Primary education is not covered; effects on character outcomes are not tested	Table 3

Source: Author's analysis (2026).

4. Discussion

The discussion interprets rather than restates the results. It positions the proposed framework against existing models (4.1), clarifies its status and relationships (4.2), shows how Islamic educational principles shape each role (4.3), examines the conflicting evidence on teachers' digital competence (4.4), qualifies the evidence on character change (4.5), and sets out implications, limitations, and a research agenda (4.6).

Positioning the Framework against Existing Models

The closest existing model is that of Masfufah and Sholicha (2026), who identify six competence pillars for fostering students' digital morals: critical digital pedagogy, proactive moral

guidance, ecosystemic collaboration, contextual learning design, personal resilience and adaptability, and education policy advocacy. The overlap with the framework proposed here is substantial and intentional. Critical digital pedagogy corresponds to the roles of facilitator and curator and of religious digital literacy educator; proactive moral guidance to the roles of digital role model and spiritual mentor; ecosystemic collaboration to the family and community partner; and contextual learning design to the learning innovator. The last two pillars, resilience and policy advocacy, appear here as enabling conditions rather than roles (author's analysis). A new list of what teachers should do is therefore not the contribution. The framework differs in four respects.

First, the unit of analysis differs. A competence pillar specifies what a teacher should be able to do; a role specifies what a teacher does differently in response to a particular concern. A competence is a resource, and a role is its use in a situation, which is why the same competence can yield different practice. Second, the framework explains where a competence list describes. Each role is tied to a character concern, a component of character, a learning mechanism, and an Islamic educational principle (section 4.3), and this chain produces propositions that can be tested. Third, the framework treats teacher, school, and family-policy conditions as variables that determine whether a role is enacted, which makes it possible to examine the conflicting evidence on teacher competence (section 4.4) rather than assume a uniform deficit. Fourth, the Islamic principle attached to each role also states how the role should not be exercised, for example as guidance and not control over students' access to content (section 4.3).

Muksin and Afandi (2025) identify teacher literacy, curriculum relevance, and contextual pedagogy as the challenges of digital ethics learning. Their review concerns what digital ethics education requires, whereas the present framework concerns what teachers do; the two are compatible. Curriculum relevance is not a separate element here and is treated as a policy-level condition. These claims about difference are the authors' analysis, and their value depends on whether the propositions survive empirical testing.

The Conceptual Framework: Status, Relationships, and Propositions

Figure 1 presents the framework. It is an integrative synthesis: its building blocks are existing theories (Lickona, Bandura, TPACK, and the Islamic educational functions) and the reviewed evidence, while its original elements are the proposed links among them and the propositions in Table 6. It is not an empirically validated model. In the figure, solid arrows mark relationships that the reviewed literature reports, and dashed arrows mark relationships that this article proposes and that remain untested.

Four relationships carry the framework, and each rests on its own reasoning and evidence.

(a) *Digital environment and reported character concerns.* The studies report an association, but none tests causation (section 4.5). Bandura (1999) offers a possible mechanism, the dulling of moral sensitivity through repeated exposure to negative content, which earlier studies invoked (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 84) but did not test.

(b) *Character concerns and roles*. The article proposes that each cluster of concerns calls for particular roles: habits and self-regulation for role modeling, innovation, and family partnership; values and moral sensitivity for mentoring; and sources of religious information for curation and literacy education. The reasoning is that modeling and habituation shape behavior (Bandura, 1977), that moral feeling requires dialogue and not instruction alone (Lickona, 1991), and that the problem of unverified sources calls for the skill of verification (QS. Al-Hujurat: 6). The evidence is that the reviewed studies describe these roles as responses to the corresponding concerns (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, pp. 82, 84, 87; Mahesa et al., 2025), but the explicit mapping is the authors' own.

(c) *Enabling conditions and role enactment.* TPACK and the research on teacher beliefs imply that enactment depends on how technology, pedagogy, and content are integrated and on teachers' beliefs, and not only on technical skill (Ertmer et al., 2012; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The evidence is

partly supportive (Fadhilah & Budiyono, 2025, pp. 126–127; Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, pp. 31, 33–34) and partly conflicting (Oviyanti et al., 2026), as section 4.4 discusses.

(d) *Roles and character outcomes.* Mapping the roles to Lickona's components is the author's analysis. The roles of curator and literacy educator mainly address moral knowing, the mentor mainly moral feeling, and the roles of model, innovator, and partner mainly moral action, since values are seen, habituated, and practiced. The mapping is not exclusive: *tabayyun*, for example, involves both knowing and acting. No reviewed study tests whether the roles change the outcomes.

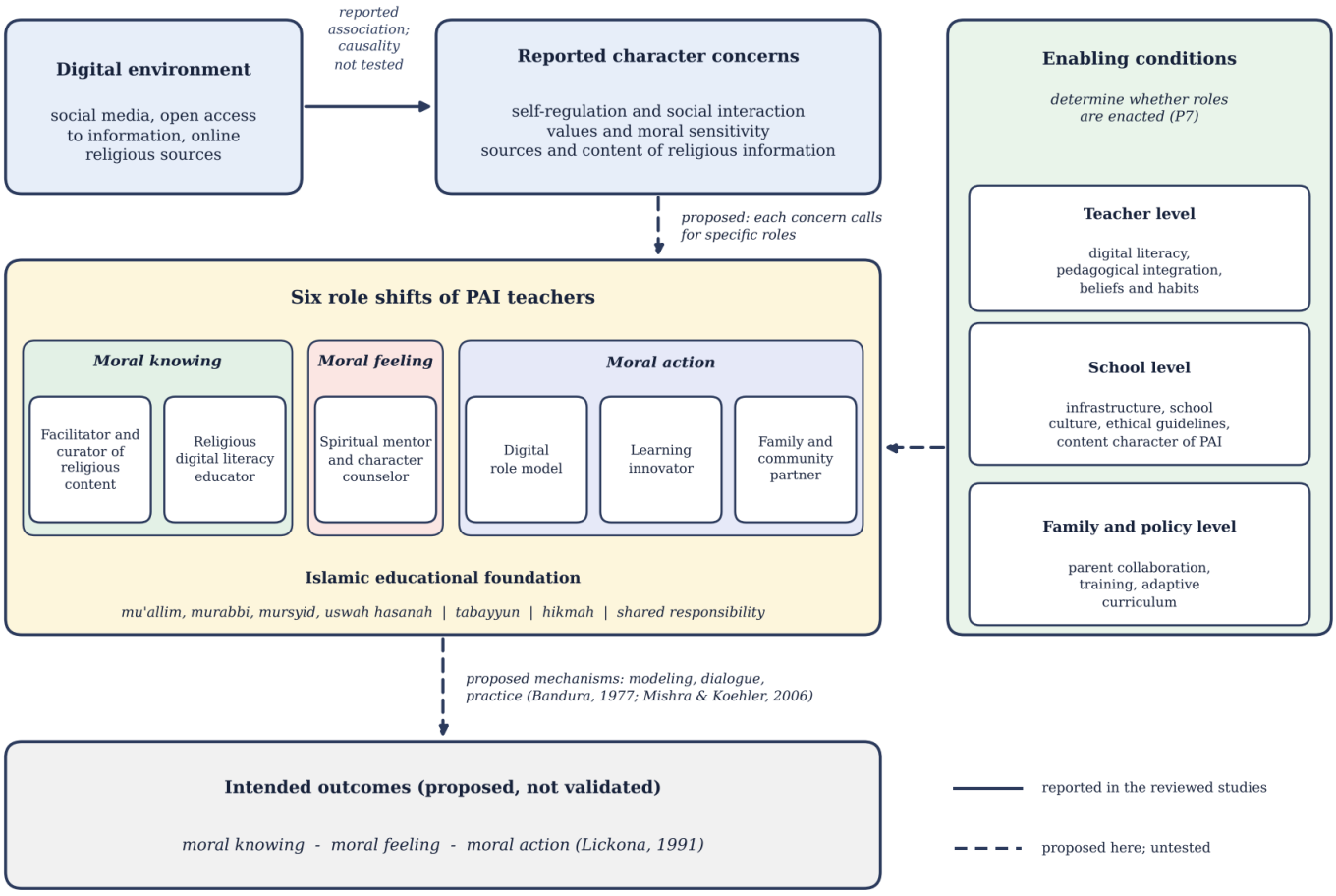


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Transformation of PAI Teachers' Roles (Source: Author's analysis, 2026)

Islamic Educational Principles within the Six Roles

Islamic principles do more than justify the roles. They specify the purpose, method, and limit of each role, which is what distinguishes role transformation in Islamic education from technical adaptation. Table 6 summarizes this for each role and states the corresponding proposition.

The role of *digital role model* rests on *uswah hasanah* (QS. Al-Ahzab: 21). The principle turns the teacher's own online conduct, such as courtesy in messaging groups and care before sharing information, into part of the curriculum, and social learning theory explains how: students learn from the models they observe (Bandura, 1977). The roles of *facilitator and curator* and of *religious digital literacy educator* rest on the *mu'allim* function and on *tabayyun* (QS. Al-Hujurat: 6). Because the verse commands verifying news, verification is an action as well as a piece of knowledge, so discussions of hoax cases should end in a concrete habit, such as verifying before sharing, and not stop at understanding. The same principle shifts the teacher's authority from possessing information to evaluating and explaining it, which matters when online religious sources vary in quality (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 82; Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020).

The principle of wise preaching and good teaching (*hikmah* and *mau'izah hasanah*; QS. An-Nahl: 125) sets the limit on the curating role: teachers are expected to guide students in distinguishing valid from misleading sources and not simply to close off access (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, pp. 82, 84). The success of the role should therefore be judged by the growth of students' capacity to evaluate sources independently, not only by reduced exposure; this criterion is proposed by the authors. The same principle underlies the *spiritual mentor and character counselor* role, which requires the teacher to listen before advising (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 87), and it offers a way to counter moral disengagement through dialogue and reflection (author's analysis). Where the boundary lies between this mentoring and professional guidance and counseling is not addressed in the reviewed studies and needs to be clarified. The *learning innovator* role also draws on *hikmah*, understood as fitting the method to the learner, and the choice of media is assessed by pedagogical relevance and conformity with Islamic values (Fadhilah & Budiyono, 2025, p. 128); the value of technology then depends on pedagogical design, in line with TPACK. Finally, the *family and community partner* role rests on the *murabbi* function and on the believers' responsibility toward their families (QS. At-Tahrim: 6; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, n.d.), which matches the policy view of character education as a shared responsibility of school, family, and community (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 83).

The principles can be condensed into four evaluative questions for teachers: Is my conduct worthy of emulation? Has the information I convey been verified? Is my message delivered wisely? Am I sharing responsibility with the family? These questions are the author's formulation.

Table 6. Roles, Islamic Educational Principles, Mechanisms, and Propositions

Role	**Islamic educational principle**	**Mechanism (theory)**	**Proposition (untested)**
Digital role model	*Uswah hasanah* (QS. Al-Ahzab: 21)	Observational learning (Bandura, 1977)	**P1.** Students whose teachers show consistent, visible digital conduct (courtesy, verification before sharing) show more of that conduct themselves than students whose teachers do not.
Facilitator and curator of religious content	*Mu'allim*; *hikmah* (QS. An-Nahl: 125)	Guided examination of content builds evaluative skill (moral knowing; Lickona, 1991)	**P2.** Guided discussion and reflection on online religious content improves students' ability to distinguish credible from misleading sources more than teacher-led exposition alone.
Religious digital literacy educator	*Tabayyun* (QS. Al-Hujurat: 6)	Knowing becomes action when linked to a concrete rule (Lickona, 1991)	**P3.** *Tabayyun* discussions paired with an explicit verification rule increase verification behavior beyond what discussion alone achieves.
Spiritual mentor and character counselor	*Murabbi*, *mursyid*; *mau'izah hasanah* (QS. An-Nahl: 125)	Dialogue restores moral engagement (moral feeling; Bandura, 1999; Lickona, 1991)	**P4.** Regular personal dialogue with a teacher is associated with higher moral sensitivity among students who report heavy exposure to negative online content.

Role	Islamic educational principle	Mechanism (theory)	Proposition (untested)
Learning innovator	*Mu'allim*; *hikmah* as fitting method to learner	Integration of technology, pedagogy, and content (Mishra & Koehler, 2006)	**P5.** Digital media improve religious character outcomes only when integrated through pedagogical design (quizzes, discussion, projects), not when used as passive video supplements.
Family and community partner	*Murabbi*; shared responsibility (QS. At-Tahrim: 6)	Consistent models across settings reinforce learning (Bandura, 1977)	**P6.** Regular teacher–parent communication and guided gadget use at home strengthen the effect of school character programs on students' digital conduct.
Enabling conditions (all roles)	–	Integration of technology, pedagogy, and content; teacher beliefs (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Ertmer et al., 2012)	**P7.** Role enactment is predicted more strongly by pedagogical integration of technology, teachers' beliefs, and school culture than by operational digital competence.

Note: Principles, mechanisms, and propositions are the authors' proposals and have not been tested empirically. Source: Author's analysis (2026).

Reconciling Conflicting Evidence on Teachers' Digital Competence

The evidence on teachers' digital competence conflicts. A national survey of 12,002 PAI teachers reports generally high competence after the Teacher Professional Program (Oviyanti et al., 2026), whereas field studies report that not all teachers have adequate technical skills and confidence (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, pp. 32–33; Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 87), and two comparator reviews report literacy gaps (Masfufah & Sholicha, 2026; Muksin & Afandi, 2025). The findings need not be contradictory. Three explanations can be tested. The populations and contexts differ: the survey covers teachers across regions who have completed the professional program, whereas the field studies examine particular school contexts. The constructs differ: competence in operating technology is not the same as the ability to integrate technology, pedagogy, and content (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). And competence does not automatically become practice, because teachers' beliefs and school culture also play a role (Ertmer et al., 2012; Fadhilah & Budiyono, 2025, pp. 126–127). The available summary of the survey does not report its instrument in detail, so it cannot be determined whether competence was measured by self-report or by performance, which limits what the survey can show about practice.

The conflict has three implications for the framework. First, low digital literacy should not be treated as a uniform national deficit. The finding in section 3.4 is contextual, and the framework therefore places teacher competence among the enabling conditions, where it varies by teacher and school. Second, even high operational competence would not guarantee that the roles in Table 4 are enacted, particularly those that depend on pedagogical design (curation, literacy education, innovation). This yields a condition proposition (P7): role enactment is predicted more strongly by pedagogical integration of technology, teachers' beliefs, and school culture than by operational digital competence. Third, the practical consequence is that training should start from diagnosis of what teachers can already do, and, as TPACK suggests, from concrete examples of PAI content and

not from tools in general; a training program that only teaches applications risks leaving unchanged the pattern in which media remain a supplement to lectures (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, pp. 31, 33–34). Aggregate figures may also mask gaps between regions and schools, which is a further reason why transformation should not rest on teachers alone.

Qualifying the Evidence on Character Change

The studies portray students as familiar with technology but weak in self-control and concentration (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 84). This picture needs to be read with caution for three reasons. First, critical reviews show that students' digital skills are not uniform and that the evidence for fundamentally different generations is weak and inconsistent (Bennett et al., 2008), so teachers should diagnose the digital habits of the students in their own classrooms and not assume that all students are alike. Second, as summarized in Table 3, none of the reviewed studies reports a test of a causal relationship between digital media use and character change. The reported changes are observed or perceived phenomena; they may also reflect family, school, and socioeconomic factors, and the studies do not allow the direction of influence to be established. Third, technology also offers opportunities for literacy, creativity, and value instillation (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 29; Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 81). The claim that student character is declining because of digital technology is therefore not supported by the reviewed evidence and is not made here.

This qualification does not remove the case for role transformation; it changes its basis. The roles in Table 4 are justified less by proof of moral decline than by a change in the context of religious education: students now meet religious authority, models of conduct, and moral content through online channels that teachers do not control. Role modeling, curation, and literacy education respond to that change whether or not character is declining. The transformation should accordingly be formulated as an effort to direct technology, not to fight it, and the framework applies to concerns that teachers actually observe in their own classrooms.

Implications, Limitations, and Research Agenda

Theoretically, the findings show that the classical functions of the PAI teacher (*mu'allim*, *murabbi*, *uswah hasanah*, and *mursyid*) are not replaced by technology but extended into digital spaces (Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, pp. 82, 84). The change lies in how the functions are carried out, not in their aims, and the framework offers testable propositions about that change. Practically, the implications differ by actor. For PAI teachers, the role of digital role model demands consistency between conduct in the classroom and in cyberspace. For schools, it implies training that combines technical and pedagogical aspects, ethical guidelines for technology use, and communication forums with parents (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 34; Safiqo & Ghofur, 2025, p. 89). For policymakers, an adaptive PAI curriculum and teacher training are needed so that teachers do not bear the transformation alone (Muslim, 2024; Samiuddin et al., 2025). For parents, guiding gadget use at home reinforces what is learned at school (Mustopa & Abdurrahmansyah, 2024, p. 30).

This study has five limitations. First, as a library study it rests on earlier research reports and has not been tested with field data. Second, the evidence base is concentrated, as section 3.6 shows: three studies account for 80 of 130 citations. Third, the search and screening did not follow a fully documented systematic review protocol or a formal quality appraisal, and the corpus is limited to SINTA journal articles from 2024–2026 in the Indonesian context; because the studies are set mainly in secondary and vocational schools, transfer to primary education needs care. Fourth, the mapping of roles to character components is interpretive. Fifth, the boundary between teachers' mentoring and professional guidance and counseling is not examined.

These limitations define a research agenda (Table 7). Multiple-case studies can examine how teachers carry out the six roles in practice. Quasi-experimental research can test the propositions in Table 6. Mixed-methods work that pairs competence measures with classroom observation can test P7 and help resolve the conflict discussed in section 4.4. An instrument for religious digital literacy

is needed, and a systematic review with a documented protocol can test whether these patterns hold in a larger corpus.

Table 7. Further Research Agenda

Research question	Design	Data and indicators
How do PAI teachers carry out the six roles in practice at different educational levels?	Multiple-case study	Classroom observation and school online activity; interviews with teachers, students, and parents
Do the propositions P1–P6 hold? For example, does religious digital literacy combined with personal guidance improve moral knowing, feeling, and action?	Quasi-experiment with a comparison group	Scales of moral knowing, feeling, and action; behavioral observation; pre- and post-intervention measurement
Is role enactment predicted more strongly by pedagogical integration, beliefs, and school culture than by operational competence (P7)?	Mixed-methods study	Performance-based competence measures, teacher belief scales, school culture indicators, and classroom observation
How can religious digital literacy be measured validly and reliably?	Instrument development and validation	Content validity, factor analysis, and reliability tests
Do the patterns found here hold in a larger corpus?	Systematic review	Documented protocol, multiple databases, and quality appraisal

Note: This agenda is the authors' proposal. Source: Author's analysis (2026).

5. Conclusion

The reviewed studies report changes in students' self-regulation, attitudes and values, moral sensitivity, and sources of religious information in the digital era. These are reported concerns, not established effects, and they cannot be addressed by an approach that only emphasizes delivering material. The changed context in which students meet religious authority and models of conduct is itself sufficient reason to rethink the roles of PAI teachers.

This article proposes that PAI teachers' roles shift in six directions: digital role model; facilitator and curator of religious content; religious digital literacy educator; spiritual mentor and character counselor; learning innovator; and family and community partner. The framework contributes an explanatory chain from reported character concerns to enabling conditions, roles, and intended character outcomes, grounded in character education theory, social learning theory, TPACK, and Islamic educational principles, and states it as seven testable propositions. It differs from competence models in treating roles, and not competences, as the unit of analysis and in making the conditions of enactment explicit. The transformation does not change the aim of Islamic education, namely forming faithful, devout, and morally upright learners, but renews the means of achieving it. Because the framework is a conceptual synthesis, it should be read as a proposal that remains to be tested.

PAI teachers should continue to strengthen their digital and pedagogical competence without abandoning moral role modeling. Schools need to provide training, facilities, and ethical guidelines for technology use, parents are expected to accompany their children's gadget use and keep in regular contact with teachers, and policymakers need to support an adaptive curriculum and teacher development. Future research should test the propositions empirically, beginning with the

effectiveness of digital PAI learning models for character formation and with the relationship between teachers' digital competence and their enactment of the roles.

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