



Strengthening Digital Religious Character: A Conceptual Framework for Islamic Religious Education Teachers to Address Religiously Motivated Cyberbullying

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ABSTRACT

The expansion of digital interaction among secondary school students has generated new educational challenges, particularly cyberbullying, which becomes more complex when attacks target religious identity, beliefs, symbols, or differences in religious interpretation. This article aims to conceptually examine the strategies of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in addressing religion-related cyberbullying through the strengthening of digital religious character. The study employs a conceptual literature review by synthesizing scholarly literature on cyberbullying, digital citizenship, digital literacy, character education, religiosity, religious moderation, and Islamic Religious Education. A thematic synthesis was conducted to identify conceptual patterns, protective mechanisms, research gaps, and relevant pedagogical strategies. The findings indicate that digital religious character can function as an integrative mechanism linking digital literacy with Islamic values to promote ethical online behavior. The proposed strategies include strengthening critical digital literacy, internalizing Islamic communication ethics, habituating *tabayyun*, developing religious moderation, empathy, and self-control, implementing case-based learning, and applying restorative responses to cyberbullying incidents. The study proposes a preventive–responsive conceptual model integrating digital literacy, Islamic values, religious moderation, empathy, self-control, and school–family collaboration. The model positions IRE teachers as agents of digital moral development and provides a conceptual foundation for future empirical research examining the effectiveness and contextual applicability of digital religious character development in preventing religion-related cyberbullying among secondary school students.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of digital technology has reshaped the patterns of social interaction among students, particularly through social media, messaging applications, and various digital platforms that have become integral to adolescents' everyday lives. Digital spaces not only provide opportunities for learning, communication, and self-expression but also generate new risks, particularly cyberbullying. Systematic reviews indicate that cyberbullying constitutes a serious concern among children and adolescents, with prevalence rates varying across social and cultural contexts and being influenced by individual, relational, and school environmental factors (Zhu et al., 2021). Among secondary school students, this issue is particularly significant because

adolescents are undergoing identity formation, heightened sensitivity to peer acceptance, and the development of personal value systems. Consequently, negative experiences in digital environments may affect their psychological and social development (Evangelio et al., 2021).

Cyberbullying is not merely a form of inappropriate technology use but a form of social aggression that can occur repeatedly, spread rapidly, and leave a persistent digital footprint. Insults, threats, the dissemination of humiliating information, social exclusion, and attacks on victims' identities can be rapidly replicated by other users, thereby amplifying their impact beyond that of face-to-face interactions. Various studies have associated cyberbullying with anxiety, depression, lower psychological well-being, social isolation, and adjustment difficulties among adolescents (Zhu et al., 2021; Evangelio et al., 2021). Therefore, cyberbullying should not be understood solely as an individual behavioral problem but as an educational issue involving school culture, peer groups, families, and digital environments simultaneously (Gabrielli et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2025).

The issue becomes increasingly complex when cyberbullying involves identity, symbols, beliefs, or differences in religious understanding as the basis of attacks. Religiously motivated cyberbullying may include insults directed at religious beliefs, harassment involving religious symbols, negative labeling, the dissemination of content that demeans particular religious groups, and exclusion based on religious identity. This issue is particularly important in the context of Indonesia, a religiously diverse and pluralistic society, where religious identity constitutes an important dimension of students' social identities with both personal and communal significance. Recent studies suggest that the development of digital technology can influence the formation of religious identity and adolescent well-being, while digital spaces may also become sites of identity-based harassment (Ferreira et al., 2026). Accordingly, religiously motivated cyberbullying should not be positioned merely as a matter of social media ethics but also as an issue concerning tolerance, character development, respect for human dignity, and religious coexistence.

Within this context, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) occupies a strategic position because its orientation extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge to the development of morality, self-control, responsibility, social concern, and behavior consistent with Islamic values. This relevance has become increasingly important as students' social interactions have expanded into digital spaces. A study involving 2,763 secondary school students in Indonesia found that religiosity may function as a protective factor against cyberbullying, while self-control represents one of the important mechanisms associated with such behavior (Bukhori et al., 2024). These findings indicate that religious education should not be limited to normative understanding but should also be directed toward enabling students to internalize religious values in decision-making and behavioral self-regulation when confronted with conflicts in digital environments.

Strengthening IRE in addressing cyberbullying also requires broadening the meaning of digital literacy from technical skills to ethical and moral literacy. Digital education that focuses solely on account security, privacy, or device use is insufficient if students lack the ability to consider the moral consequences of their digital actions. Research on online safety education highlights the need to shift from a purely protective approach toward strengthening critical competencies and responsible digital citizenship (Estéllés & Doyle, 2025). Harrison and Polizzi (2021), in a study involving 1,947 adolescents, demonstrated that virtue-based considerations play an important role in moral decision-making when adolescents encounter incivility in digital environments. From an Islamic educational perspective, this need can be reinforced through the internalization of values such as *adab* (proper conduct), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabayyun* (careful verification of information), honesty, *ukhuwah* (brotherhood and solidarity), respect for others, and self-control as foundations for developing a digitally responsible religious character (Setiawan et al., 2025; Putra et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, existing approaches to cyberbullying prevention continue to demonstrate certain limitations. A meta-analysis of 17 studies involving 35,694 adolescents found that various

educational interventions produced only small effects in reducing bullying and cyberbullying behaviors, indicating that program effectiveness depends substantially on intervention design, implementation agents, and contextual factors (Ng et al., 2020). Another review demonstrated that prevention strategies generally involve schools and families through educational, technological, or combined approaches; however, effective responses require comprehensive and collaborative interventions (Tozzo et al., 2022). Therefore, responses to cyberbullying should not be limited to punishment after violations have occurred. Instead, they should emphasize the development of character, social-emotional skills, empathy, self-control, and positive digital behavioral norms from the outset (Gabrielli et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2025).

Although research on cyberbullying, digital citizenship, religiosity, and Islamic education continues to expand, studies that specifically integrate the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers with the strengthening of digital religious character to address religiously motivated cyberbullying among secondary school students remain limited. Some studies primarily approach cyberbullying from the perspectives of mental health, social behavior, digital safety, or general school-based interventions (Zhu et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2020), while research in Indonesia has demonstrated relationships among religiosity, self-control, and cyberbullying (Bukhori et al., 2024). At the same time, emerging studies in Islamic education have emphasized the importance of *adab* and Islamic values in developing digital ethics (Setiawan et al., 2025), yet relatively few have articulated how these values can be translated into pedagogical strategies employed by IRE teachers to address cyberbullying specifically rooted in religious differences. This gap highlights the need for a conceptual framework that connects religious education, digital literacy, character development, and the prevention of identity-based violence in digital spaces.

Based on this gap, this article aims to conceptually analyze the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers to address religiously motivated cyberbullying among secondary school students through the strengthening of digital religious character. The article argues that addressing cyberbullying requires more than technological solutions, disciplinary regulations, or repressive measures; rather, it requires the integration of digital literacy, Islamic communication ethics, self-control, empathy, tolerance, religious moderation, and collaboration between schools and families. The conceptual contribution of this article lies in positioning IRE teachers as agents of digital moral development who assist students in translating Islamic values into concrete behaviors when communicating, sharing information, expressing opinions, and responding to differences in digital environments. This framework is expected to enrich the development of Islamic Religious Education in the digital era while providing a foundation for future empirical research on strategies for strengthening digital religious character to prevent and address religiously motivated cyberbullying.

METHODS

This article employs a conceptual literature review approach to analyze the strategies of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in addressing religiously motivated cyberbullying through the strengthening of digital religious character. A conceptual approach was selected because the study does not aim to test hypotheses or measure the effectiveness of an intervention among specific participants. Rather, it seeks to integrate diverse empirical findings and theoretical perspectives to develop a coherent argument and conceptual framework based on the relationships among cyberbullying, character education, digital literacy, religiosity, and Islamic Religious Education. A literature synthesis approach was employed to identify patterns, conceptual relationships, research gaps, and pedagogical implications emerging from previous studies (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

The data sources consisted of scholarly journal articles relevant to cyberbullying, digital citizenship, digital ethics, religiosity, Islamic education, religious moderation, character education,

and adolescent development. The literature search was conducted through relevant academic databases, particularly Consensus, Google Scholar, and international journal databases indexed by Scopus and/or Web of Science, using combinations of keywords such as *cyberbullying*, *religious cyberbullying*, *religious identity*, *adolescent cyberbullying*, *Islamic religious education*, *Islamic digital literacy*, *digital ethics*, *religiosity and cyberbullying*, *religious moderation*, and *digital character*. Priority was given to literature published between 2020 and 2026, while older sources were retained when they provided foundational theoretical perspectives that remained relevant to the conceptual framework.

The literature was selected based on several criteria. The inclusion criteria were: (1) the article was published in a scholarly journal; (2) it had substantive relevance to one or more of the conceptual variables addressed in the study; (3) it concerned children, adolescents, students, education, or digital environments; (4) its bibliographic information could be independently verified; and (5) for empirical studies, its methodology and findings were described with sufficient clarity. The exclusion criteria included articles focusing exclusively on technical aspects of technology without educational relevance, popular or non-academic publications, duplicate publications, and sources lacking adequate bibliographic information.

The literature was analyzed using thematic synthesis. The analytical process consisted of five stages: (1) identifying the central concepts emerging from the selected literature; (2) organizing findings into key themes, including cyberbullying, protective factors, digital religious character, digital literacy and ethics, the role of IRE teachers, and religious moderation; (3) comparing similarities and differences across the arguments and findings of the reviewed sources; (4) identifying conceptual gaps in previous research; and (5) integrating the synthesized findings into a conceptual framework concerning IRE teachers' strategies for developing digital religious character. The synthesis was interpretive and considered the context of Islamic education and the characteristics of digital interactions among secondary school students rather than employing statistical meta-analysis.

To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the sources, the literature was prioritized according to relevance, journal quality, recency, and the verifiability of bibliographic information. The synthesis process also involved comparing findings across multiple disciplines, particularly education, psychology, digital studies, and Islamic education, to ensure that the resulting argument was not dependent on a single disciplinary perspective. This approach is consistent with established principles of literature review, which emphasize systematic searching, selection, evaluation, and synthesis as essential processes for producing transparent and academically rigorous scholarship (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

As a conceptual study, the findings are not intended to produce empirical generalizations. Instead, the primary contribution of the study lies in conceptual synthesis and the formulation of a strategic framework that can serve as a foundation for subsequent empirical research, particularly research examining the relationships among digital religious character, digital literacy, religiosity, religious moderation, and cyberbullying behavior among secondary school students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religiously Motivated Cyberbullying as an Emerging Challenge for Education

The synthesis of the literature indicates that cyberbullying among adolescents is a multidimensional problem that cannot be understood merely as aggressive behavior on social media. Cyberbullying operates through the interaction of individual characteristics, peer relationships, family dynamics, school environments, and the characteristics of digital technologies. An umbrella review analyzing 56 meta-analyses and 296 effect sizes demonstrated that cyberbullying victimization is associated with various psychological and environmental factors, including previous experiences of bullying, high levels of internet use, unsupportive school environments, and less supportive parent-child relationships. Victimization is also consistently

associated with negative psychological consequences, poorer school performance, and maladaptive coping patterns (Kasturiratna et al., 2025). These findings confirm that addressing cyberbullying requires an ecological approach that goes beyond changing individual behavior.

In a more specific context, religiously motivated cyberbullying has particularly sensitive characteristics because digital attacks are directed toward aspects of identity associated with religious beliefs, symbols, practices, or affiliations. Such behavior may include mocking religious practices, insulting religious symbols, labeling particular religious groups, disseminating content that humiliates individuals because of their religious identity, or digitally excluding individuals based on differences in religious understanding. These characteristics make cyberbullying not merely an interpersonal problem but also an issue of identity, dignity, tolerance, and intergroup relations. Research on ethnic, cultural, and religious inequalities in cyberbullying indicates that certain social identities may increase vulnerability to victimization as well as involvement in digital aggression (Ortiz-Marcos et al., 2026). Meanwhile, studies examining technological development and adolescents' religious identities suggest that digital spaces can become sites of identity-based harassment while simultaneously influencing psychological well-being and the formation of religious identity (Ferreira et al., 2026).

The educational implications are clear: religiously motivated cyberbullying cannot be adequately addressed solely through social media usage regulations or by punishing perpetrators after incidents occur. Students need to develop an understanding that freedom of expression has limits when expression undermines the dignity of others. At this point, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) provides an important space for intervention. IRE can connect digital issues with principles of morality, responsibility, respect for others, and self-control, enabling students to understand that behavior in digital spaces remains part of moral conduct for which individuals are accountable. Such an approach is more relevant than simply imposing prohibitions because cyberbullying is fundamentally a matter of moral decision-making in digital contexts.

Research conducted in Indonesia further strengthens this argument. Bukhori et al. (2024), in a study involving 2,763 secondary school students, found that religiosity, conformity, and authoritarian parenting were associated with cyberbullying behavior, both directly and through self-control. Religiosity and conformity may function as protective factors, while self-control represents an important mechanism that can reduce the tendency toward cyberbullying behavior. These findings demonstrate that the religious dimension becomes particularly relevant when translated into psychological and behavioral capacities, especially students' ability to regulate impulses and consider the consequences of their actions. Thus, religious education that remains limited to the acquisition of religious knowledge is insufficient; religious values need to be internalized as character that operates when students encounter concrete situations in digital environments.

Digital Religious Character as a Foundation for Prevention

Based on the synthesis of the literature, the concept most relevant to bridging Islamic Religious Education with the problem of cyberbullying is digital religious character. This concept refers to students' ability and disposition to apply religious values when communicating, making decisions, expressing opinions, receiving information, and responding to conflicts in digital environments. Digital religious character is therefore not merely the ability to understand religious rules concerning technology use but rather the capacity to transform religious values into a mechanism for behavioral self-regulation.

This concept is supported by an increasingly substantial empirical foundation. Harrison and Polizzi (2021), through a survey of 1,947 adolescents aged 13–16 years in England, found that most respondents employed virtue-ethical considerations when providing reasons for moral decisions concerning online incivility. This finding demonstrates the relevance of character- and virtue-based approaches to digital education in reducing uncivil behavior in digital environments. Similarly, a

study involving 7,837 late adolescents found that *cyber moral literacy* was strongly and negatively associated with cyberbullying, while *moral disengagement* represented one of the mechanisms explaining this relationship (Sun et al., 2025). In other words, the stronger an individual's moral capacity to understand the consequences of digital behavior, the lower the tendency to engage in cyberbullying; conversely, processes of moral disengagement may facilitate online aggression toward others.

Digital religious character can be conceptualized through several core components. First, moral responsibility, referring to an awareness that every comment, post, and digital action may have consequences for others. Second, *tabayyun*, referring to the practice of verifying the accuracy of information before accepting or disseminating it. Third, communication ethics (*adab*), referring to the ability to express opinions without insulting, humiliating, or degrading others. Fourth, digital empathy, referring to the ability to understand the emotional impact of digital actions on others. Fifth, self-control, referring to the ability to restrain impulsive responses when confronted with provocation. Sixth, tolerance, referring to the ability to respect differences in identity, perspectives, and religious expression.

These components are consistent with the development of the concept of digital citizenship. A meta-analysis by Lu and Gu (2024) of 46 studies on digital citizenship among adolescents demonstrated that digital citizenship influences students' online behavior, while digital citizenship education has small-to-moderate effects in reducing negative online behaviors. This finding is important because it demonstrates that digital competence is not merely a matter of being able to use technological devices but also concerns how students behave as members of a digital society. By incorporating religious values into this framework, IRE can provide a more specific moral dimension that is aligned with the context of Islamic education.

Digital religious character should also be distinguished from religiosity itself. Religiosity refers to an individual's religious orientation or degree of attachment to religion, whereas digital religious character describes how such values are manifested in concrete behavior within digital environments. This distinction is important because an individual may possess substantial religious knowledge without necessarily being able to apply it when confronted with provocation, disagreement, or peer pressure on social media. Therefore, the role of IRE teachers is not merely to enhance students' religious knowledge but to transform such knowledge into digital moral habits.

Accordingly, digital religious character can be positioned as a mechanism connecting religious values and digital behavior. Conceptually, this relationship can be formulated as follows:

Islamic Values → Moral Internalization → Digital Religious Character → Digital
Behavioral Self-Regulation → Cyberbullying Prevention

This framework demonstrates that strengthening digital religious character is primarily preventive rather than repressive. Teachers do not wait until students become perpetrators or victims of cyberbullying; instead, they cultivate moral capacities that enable students to make appropriate decisions before digital conflicts occur.

IRE Teachers' Strategies through Digital Literacy and Islamic Communication Ethics

The literature synthesis indicates that IRE teachers' strategies should integrate digital literacy with moral and character education, rather than treating the two as separate areas of instruction. Digital literacy enables students to understand how information, social media, algorithms, and digital communication operate, while religious education provides a moral framework for determining how such capabilities should be used. Integrating these dimensions is essential because knowledge of digital risks does not automatically translate into ethical behavior. A meta-analysis of digital citizenship education indicates that such education can reduce negative online behavior, but its effects are generally small to moderate, suggesting that instruction should

focus on developing students' internal capacities rather than merely transferring information (Lu & Gu, 2025).

Within the context of IRE, digital literacy can be developed through the principles of *tabayyun*, *amanah*, *sidq*, *adab*, and responsibility. The principle of *tabayyun*, for example, can be applied when students encounter news, screenshots, video clips, or religious information whose sources are unclear. The principle of *amanah* concerns the responsibility to protect personal information and refrain from disseminating content that may harm others. Meanwhile, *adab* provides guidance on how students should communicate comments and express differences of opinion. Research on Islamic education and digital ethics indicates that the values of *adab*, honesty, *tabayyun*, and responsibility constitute important foundations for responding to misinformation, cyberbullying, hate speech, and other moral challenges in digital environments (Setiawan et al., 2025).

These strategies can be implemented by IRE teachers through digital case-based learning. Rather than merely providing students with a definition of cyberbullying, teachers can expose them to cases that are closely connected to students' everyday experiences, such as comments insulting another person's religious practices, memes that demean particular groups, or the dissemination of screenshots of private conversations. Students can then be guided to identify the form of violation, analyze its impact on the victim, identify relevant Islamic values, and determine the most ethical response. Such an approach enables IRE learning to move beyond the memorization of norms toward moral decision-making.

This approach can be implemented through a simple learning cycle: case identification → information verification → analysis of Islamic values → reflection on impact → decision-making → responsible action. At the identification stage, students recognize forms of cyberbullying; at the verification stage, they establish the facts and context; at the analysis stage, they connect the case with relevant Islamic values; at the reflection stage, they consider the victim's perspective; and at the decision-making stage, they determine an appropriate response that does not escalate the conflict. This cycle can be developed through group discussions, *role-play* activities, social media comment analysis, written reflection, and positive digital campaign projects.

A skills-based approach is also supported by empirical evidence. A meta-analysis of 16 studies on digital health interventions found that digital interventions had an effect size of approximately $d = 0.19$ in reducing cyberbullying, with relatively important components including bystander training, coping skills, and interactive games (Chen et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the meta-analysis by Polanin et al. (2021), which included 50 studies, 320 effect sizes, and 45,371 participants, found that intervention programs significantly reduced cyberbullying perpetration ($g = -0.18$) and victimization ($g = -0.13$). These findings indicate that educational interventions have meaningful potential, although their effects are relatively small, underscoring the need for context-sensitive and sustained program design.

These findings have important implications for IRE teachers. Instruction should not merely communicate the message "do not engage in cyberbullying" but should provide students with the moral and social skills necessary to navigate situations that may trigger cyberbullying. Students need to learn how to respond to provocative comments, when to disengage from an argument, how to verify information, when to report harmful content, how to support victims, and how to correct their behavior if they have participated in disseminating harmful content. In this way, IRE teachers function as facilitators who connect religious knowledge, digital skills, and moral decision-making.

Conceptually, this strategy can be formulated into three layers. The first layer is literacy, referring to the ability to understand the risks and characteristics of digital communication. The second layer is value internalization, referring to the process of using Islamic principles as moral considerations. The third layer is practice, referring to the ability to translate these values into concrete actions. Together, these three layers produce a more operational form of digital religious character that can be observed through students' behavior, including their ability to verify

information, avoid insults, respect differences, regulate their responses, and provide support to victims.

Accordingly, IRE teachers' strategies for addressing religiously motivated cyberbullying should not be positioned as an additional program outside regular IRE instruction but should be integrated into the teaching of Islamic morality (*akhlak*), Qur'an and Hadith, social jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and character education. Such integration enables cyberbullying to be understood as a contemporary issue directly connected to the objectives of Islamic Religious Education: developing students who possess not only religious knowledge but also moral integrity and social responsibility.

Religious Moderation, Empathy, and Self-Control as Protective Mechanisms

The literature synthesis indicates that strengthening digital religious character is more effective when it extends beyond the acquisition of religious norms and is directed toward three key psychopedagogical mechanisms: religious moderation, empathy, and self-control. These three components serve complementary functions. Religious moderation provides a framework for understanding and responding to differences proportionately; empathy enables students to consider the experiences and feelings of others; and self-control helps students regulate their impulses before responding in digital environments. Thus, these three components can be understood as mechanisms that translate religious values into constructive digital behavior.

Religious moderation is particularly important because religiously motivated cyberbullying often emerges when differences in beliefs, practices, or religious interpretations are perceived as threats to group identity. Under such circumstances, religious education needs to develop students' ability to distinguish between personal religious convictions and the obligation to respect the existence of others who hold different beliefs. A systematic review by Muis (2025) in the *British Journal of Religious Education* demonstrates that the concept of *wasatiyyah* in Islamic religious education is associated with balance in belief, practice, and social interaction and can be integrated through learning objectives, learning experiences, pedagogical methods, and assessment. Therefore, religious moderation should not be positioned as an additional topic but as a pedagogical orientation that permeates the teaching and learning process in IRE.

In digital environments, religious moderation can be translated into the ability to avoid extremity in online comments, refrain from generalizing about religious groups, avoid hastily assigning religious labels, respect differences in *furu'iyah* and religious perspectives, and resolve disagreements through respectful and constructive dialogue. Susanto and Dwijayanto (2022) demonstrate that students' engagement with digital devices and social media may intersect with exposure to narratives of intolerance, extremism, and radicalism. Therefore, moderate Islamic education needs to be present within students' digital environments rather than being confined to the classroom. IRE teachers can use current social media cases as learning materials to train students to distinguish criticism of ideas from attacks on personal identity.

Empathy represents the second critical mechanism. Cyberbullying may occur more easily when perpetrators do not directly witness the emotional consequences of their actions. Digital distance, anonymity, and text-based communication can reduce awareness of victims' suffering and facilitate processes of moral disengagement. A meta-analysis by Zych et al. indicates that involvement in cyberbullying perpetration is associated with lower levels of empathy, while more recent research suggests that empathy is positively associated with the tendency to engage in positive bystander behavior. Cai and Zhou (2024), through a meta-analysis of 20 studies involving 16,700 participants, found a positive correlation between empathy and positive bystander behavior in cyberbullying situations ($r = 0.352$; 95% CI [0.288, 0.414]). This finding indicates that cyberbullying prevention should not focus exclusively on perpetrators and victims but should also seek to transform the behavior of students who witness such incidents.

Within the context of IRE, digital empathy can be developed through the values of *rahmah*, *ukhuwah*, *ta'awun*, *busnuḥan*, and respect for human dignity. Teachers can encourage students to engage in perspective-taking through simple yet reflective questions: *How would someone feel if their religious beliefs were ridiculed in front of thousands of people? What might happen if the comment continued to be shared? Does disagreement justify insulting another person?* Such questions shift learning from merely recognizing that cyberbullying is wrong toward enabling students to understand why the behavior is wrong and who is affected by it.

Empathy should also be developed in students' capacity as *bystanders*. A meta-analysis by Torgal et al. on cyberbullying prevention programs indicates that empathy-activation components are associated with greater effectiveness in encouraging positive intervention by cyber-bystanders. This suggests that students who witness cyberbullying need to be provided with clear behavioral options: refraining from sharing harmful content, supporting the victim, reporting the content, preserving evidence when necessary, and seeking assistance from teachers or school authorities. From an Islamic educational perspective, such actions can be understood as forms of *amar ma'ruf*, social concern, and responsibility toward others, provided that they are undertaken wisely and without escalating the conflict.

The third mechanism is self-control. Empirical findings from Indonesia indicate that self-control is negatively associated with cyberbullying. Bukhori et al. (2024) found among 2,763 secondary school students that religiosity was associated with cyberbullying both directly and indirectly through self-control. This finding is further supported by Safaria and Ariani (2024), whose study involving 539 junior high school students in Yogyakarta demonstrated a significant negative relationship between self-control and cyberbullying. Thus, religiosity is likely to have stronger preventive effects when education successfully translates religious values into the capacity to regulate responses, particularly when students encounter provocation, peer pressure, or identity-related conflicts on social media.

Self-control within IRE can be cultivated through the practice of “pause before posting,” which involves developing the habit of stopping briefly before uploading or sending emotionally charged content. Teachers can introduce several reflective questions: *Is this information accurate? Is this statement necessary? Could these words hurt someone? Would I still say this if the person were standing in front of me?* These questions can be connected to the principles of *tabayyun*, ethical speech, protecting the dignity of others, and avoiding actions that cause harm. In this way, self-control is not merely treated as a psychological concept but as a moral skill practiced in everyday digital activities.

These three mechanisms can be conceptualized as an integrated sequence: moderation regulates how students perceive differences, empathy regulates how students perceive others, and self-control regulates how students respond to impulses to act. This relationship is particularly important because religiously motivated cyberbullying does not necessarily arise from a lack of religious knowledge. Students may know that insulting others is wrong yet still engage in such behavior when confronted with provocation, peer pressure, or the urge to defend group identity. Therefore, the success of IRE in digital environments should be assessed not only through increases in religious knowledge but also through changes in students' capacity to manage differences, understand others' perspectives, and regulate their own behavior.

A Strategic Model for IRE Teachers and School Ecosystem Collaboration

Based on the overall synthesis, this article proposes that IRE teachers' strategies for addressing religiously motivated cyberbullying should be developed as a preventive–responsive model grounded in digital religious character. The model consists of five interconnected components: (1) digital literacy and awareness, (2) internalization of Islamic values, (3) strengthening religious moderation, empathy, and self-control, (4) incident response, and (5) school ecosystem collaboration. The model positions IRE teachers as key pedagogical actors while

recognizing that they should not be regarded as the sole parties responsible for addressing cyberbullying.

Table 1. A Digital Religious Character-Based Strategic Model for IRE Teachers

Component	Primary Focus	Implementation	Character Developed
Critical digital literacy	Recognizing the risks and characteristics of cyberbullying	Case analysis, information verification, media literacy, and digital footprint awareness	Critical thinking and responsibility
Internalization of Islamic values	Connecting digital behavior with Islamic teachings	<i>Tabayyun</i> , communication ethics (<i>adab</i>), <i>amanah</i> , <i>ukhuvah</i> , and <i>rahmah</i>	Integrity and moral character
Moderation–empathy–self-control	Managing differences and emotional responses	Dialogue, role-play, reflection, perspective-taking, and <i>pause before posting</i>	Tolerance, empathy, and self-regulation
Incident response	Preventing further harm and restoring the impact of cyberbullying	Reporting, victim protection, mediation, and perpetrator guidance	Moral courage and responsibility
School ecosystem collaboration	Ensuring the sustainability of prevention efforts	IRE teachers–counselors–homeroom teachers–parents–school leadership	Care and collective responsibility

The model demonstrates that IRE strategies should not be merely reactive, emerging only after cyberbullying has occurred. Instead, intervention should begin preventively through character development and digital literacy, proceed to the recognition of risk indicators, and culminate in proportionate responses when incidents occur. This approach is consistent with evidence showing that cyberbullying interventions generally produce relatively small effects, suggesting that programs relying on a single form of intervention are unlikely to be sufficient (Ng et al., 2020; Polanin et al., 2021). Therefore, IRE teachers' strategies need to integrate instruction, habituation, guidance, and response mechanisms within a unified ecosystem.

At the preventive stage, IRE teachers can integrate cyberbullying-related issues into relevant learning content, particularly Islamic morality (*akhlak*), interpersonal ethics, *ukhuvah*, tolerance, *tabayyun*, and social responsibility. Instruction can employ authentic cases or digital simulations so that students not only understand the relevant norms but also develop the ability to apply them. This approach is important because research on digital citizenship indicates that digital citizenship education can influence online behavior, although its effects generally range from small to moderate (Lu & Gu, 2025). Accordingly, IRE instruction should move beyond a normative approach toward experiential moral learning, in which students learn through cases, reflection, dialogue, and practice.

At the detection and early-response stage, IRE teachers need to be sensitive to changes in students' behavior, particularly social withdrawal, interpersonal conflicts originating from social media, changes in peer-group interactions, or the emergence of content targeting particular religious identities. IRE teachers do not need to assume the entire function of school counseling but should establish referral and coordination mechanisms with school counselors and homeroom teachers. When cases involve psychological distress, threats, or the dissemination of sensitive content, the first priority should be the safety and recovery of the victim, rather than merely punishing the perpetrator.

At the guidance and rehabilitation stage, perpetrators should be addressed through educational and restorative approaches that enable them to understand the consequences of their actions, take responsibility, and repair the harm they have caused. This does not imply disregarding school sanctions when serious violations occur; rather, sanctions should be accompanied by an educational process so that intervention does not stop at external compliance. Research on moral disengagement indicates that the disengagement of moral responsibility is one mechanism associated with cyberbullying (Sun et al., 2025). Therefore, guidance should aim to rebuild a sense of responsibility and the capacity to recognize victims as human beings possessing dignity.

These strategies subsequently require school ecosystem collaboration. Cyberbullying is not confined to the classroom; incidents may occur at home, within peer groups, or through digital platforms outside school hours. A review by Bell et al. (2025) of 22 studies highlights the importance of systematically involving teachers, parents, and students in cyberbullying prevention and intervention. The review also emphasizes the importance of structural support, clearly defined responsibilities, and curriculum-based digital citizenship education. Accordingly, IRE teachers need to coordinate with school counselors, homeroom teachers, school leaders, parents, and, when necessary, other relevant professionals.

Collaboration with parents is particularly important because school-based supervision has limitations when students are outside the educational environment. A meta-analysis by Wang and Jiang (2022) of 11 studies found that parent-based interventions had small but significant effects on both cyberbullying perpetration and victimization, with effect sizes of approximately $SMD = -0.17$. This finding indicates that parental involvement is not a standalone solution but remains an important component when integrated with school-based strategies. Within the context of IRE, such collaboration can focus on establishing shared expectations regarding digital ethics, supporting responsible social media use, maintaining open communication, and reinforcing religious values at home.

Accordingly, the model proposed in this article can be summarized as follows:

Digital Literacy → Internalization of Islamic Values → Religious Moderation + Empathy + Self-Control → Ethical Digital Behavior → Restorative Response → School–Family Ecosystem → Digital Religious Character

This model represents the article's primary conceptual contribution because it connects three domains that have often been discussed separately: cyberbullying prevention, digital education, and Islamic Religious Education. Digital religious character is positioned as the connecting mechanism that transforms religious values from normative knowledge into an operational moral capacity within digital environments. Within this model, IRE teachers are not merely instructors of religious content but also serve as character educators, facilitators of digital literacy, moral role models, dialogue mediators, and bridges connecting schools, families, and students' broader social environments.

The model should also be understood as a conceptual framework requiring empirical validation, rather than as a claim that the proposed strategy has already been demonstrated to be causally effective. This study proposes that the greater the integration of digital literacy, internalization of Islamic values, religious moderation, empathy, self-control, and school ecosystem support, the greater the potential for developing responsible digital behavior and reducing the risk of religiously motivated cyberbullying. These propositions can subsequently be examined through quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research involving secondary school students.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual review demonstrates that religiously motivated cyberbullying among secondary school students is an educational issue that cannot be addressed solely through

technological monitoring, disciplinary regulations, or repressive measures. The problem is closely associated with students' capacity to manage differences, understand the consequences of digital behavior, regulate emotional responses, and apply religious values in online interactions. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers occupy a strategic position in developing digital religious character through the integration of digital literacy, internalization of Islamic values, religious moderation, empathy, and self-control. In this study, digital religious character is positioned as a mechanism that translates religious values from normative knowledge into concrete behaviors, such as practicing *tabayyun* before disseminating information, maintaining ethical communication (*adab*), respecting differences, refraining from amplifying degrading content, and demonstrating the courage to respond positively when witnessing cyberbullying.

The conceptual contribution of this article lies in the formulation of a preventive–responsive strategy grounded in digital religious character that connects digital literacy, Islamic values, moderation–empathy–self-control, restorative responses, and school–family collaboration. This model positions IRE teachers not merely as transmitters of religious knowledge but also as moral role models, facilitators of digital literacy, and agents in developing an ethical digital culture within schools. Its implementation should be undertaken collaboratively with school counselors, homeroom teachers, school leaders, parents, and students to ensure that cyberbullying prevention and intervention are not conducted sporadically. As this study is conceptual in nature, the proposed model requires further empirical testing to determine its effectiveness, underlying mechanisms, and contextual conditions influencing its implementation among secondary school students.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contributions

Nurhanifa Tamba: Conceptualization, methodology, literature review and analysis, synthesis of the literature, development of the conceptual model, and writing original draft.
Sintya: Literature analysis, interpretation of the findings, critical revision, and writing review and editing.
All authors: Reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study because it employed a conceptual literature review and did not involve human participants, animals, interviews, surveys, or the collection of primary data.

Data Availability

No new datasets were generated or analyzed in this study. The study was based on the analysis and synthesis of previously published scholarly literature, academic books, and relevant policy documents.

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The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with English-language translation, language editing, and editorial refinement of the manuscript. All AI-assisted outputs were reviewed, revised, and verified by the

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