

Spiritual Neglect in the Digital Age: Its Impact on Religious Discipline and Students' Motivation to Learn

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Keywords

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze the phenomenon of spiritual neglect in the digital era and its implications for worship discipline and learning motivation among boarding school-based Madrasah Aliyah students. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach supported by simple quantitative data. Data were collected through a Google Form-based questionnaire involving 34 students from grades X and XI, semi-structured interviews with five selected informants, post-holiday observations, and supporting documentation. The results showed that 70.6% of students used digital devices for more than four hours per day during the four-day holiday period. Furthermore, 52.9% of students reported a decline in worship quality, which was associated with increased gadget use intensity, changes in sleep patterns, and reduced self-regulation due to decreased supervision within the dormitory environment. Nevertheless, most students demonstrated improved learning focus after returning to the dormitory. These findings indicate that the boarding school environment functions as a supportive restorative setting in helping students re-establish spiritual routines and academic readiness after experiencing digital disruption during the holiday period. This study recommends strengthening spiritually oriented digital literacy programs and enhancing collaboration between dormitory administrators and parents to maintain students' worship consistency during holiday periods.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has brought significant changes to various aspects of human life, including Islamic education. The development of information technology has enabled students to gain broader access to learning resources, communication media, and virtual interaction spaces. (Affriella et al., 2026) Digital devices provide benefits through easier access to information and increased learning flexibility. However, uncontrolled use may also contribute to cognitive distraction, reduced quality of social interaction, and decreased concentration during learning activities. Previous studies have shown that high-intensity gadget use is associated with an increased risk of digital addiction and reduced psychological well-being among students (Kaya, 2024; Aydin & Kuş, 2023).

In the context of Islamic education, digital technology development presents more complex challenges because the objectives of Islamic education are not limited to academic achievement but also include spiritual character formation and moral development. Religious education institutions in Indonesia face the challenge of utilizing digital technology as a means of strengthening spiritual development while controlling its potential negative effects on students' moral growth (Larson, 2024). This indicates that the digital environment is not merely a technological medium but also a space for value formation that requires appropriate pedagogical and spiritual guidance.

This phenomenon is increasingly relevant in boarding school-based educational institutions. The dormitory environment generally implements structured routines that emphasize worship discipline, learning habits, and self-regulation through collective supervision. A structured daily schedule, including morning activities, congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, formal academic activities, and evening evaluations, gradually shapes students' religious habits. Religiosity and self-regulation have been shown to significantly influence students' adjustment abilities in modern boarding school environments (Triyuliasari & Mubarak, 2024).

The boarding school system makes these institutions an important educational environment for developing students' internal control. Through consistent habituation, students learn to manage time, maintain worship routines, and balance spiritual activities with academic responsibilities. From the perspective of educational psychology, consistent habituation can strengthen self-regulation and support more stable behavioral control (Zimmerman, 2008).

However, these dynamics may be challenged when students enter vacation periods and return to their home environments. During this phase, the collective supervision provided by boarding schools is reduced, while students gain greater freedom in accessing digital devices. This condition may lead to changes in daily activity patterns, particularly increased gadget use for social media, online games, and other forms of digital entertainment. Smartphone use duration has been associated with higher levels of digital addiction among high school students (Mufti & Berliana, 2024).

Increased gadget use intensity during holiday periods may also be accompanied by changes in sleep patterns, reduced study productivity, and weakened self-regulation. Smartphone addiction has been associated with academic procrastination and school burnout among adolescents (Kaya, 2024). Furthermore, limited self-regulation may increase students' vulnerability to problematic smartphone use (Atikah et al., 2023).

Within the context of Islamic education, this condition can be understood as a form of spiritual negligence, referring to reduced awareness of religious obligations due to excessive engagement with digital distractions (Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, 2016). Spiritual negligence does not necessarily involve completely abandoning worship but may appear through reduced attentiveness, inconsistency in religious practices, and weakened spiritual orientation in daily activities. This condition may become more prominent when individuals are continuously exposed to digital distractions (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020).

Previous research has primarily examined the relationship between digital media use and academic achievement or students' psychological well-being (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). Studies examining the relationship between digital disruption, spiritual discipline, and

the recovery of discipline after students return to boarding school environments remain limited. In particular, the boarding school environment has unique characteristics as a restorative setting that may support the reconstruction of spiritual routines through collective habituation. This research gap is increasingly relevant as boarding schools in Indonesia continue to integrate digital technology into educational practices, while the transition between digitally permissive home environments and structured dormitory environments remains insufficiently explored.

Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the phenomenon of spiritual negligence in the digital era and its implications for worship discipline and learning motivation among boarding school-based Madrasah Aliyah students during holiday periods. This study also sought to examine how the boarding school environment functions as a restorative setting in supporting the recovery of students' spiritual routines and academic readiness after experiencing digital disruption. The findings are expected to provide a basis for strengthening spiritually oriented digital literacy programs through collaboration among schools, dormitories, and families

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach supported by simple quantitative data. This approach was selected because the study aimed to understand the phenomenon of students' spiritual neglect in relation to digital device use during holiday periods and its implications for worship discipline and learning motivation after returning to the boarding school environment. The qualitative descriptive approach was used to describe students' experiences contextually, while quantitative data were used to support the identification of behavioral patterns (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024; Inayat & Younas, 2025; Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

The research was conducted at the MAN 24 Jakarta Boarding School in May 2026. The research site was selected because the madrasah implemented a dormitory-based education system with structured spiritual development activities, including congregational worship, formal learning, tahfiz activities, character development, and collective supervision. This setting was relevant to examining changes in students' spiritual discipline during holiday periods outside the boarding environment.

The research subjects consisted of 34 Madrasah Aliyah students from grades X and XI who actively participated in the boarding school system. The subjects were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria relevant to the research objectives (John W. Creswell & J. David Creswell, 2022; Kim, Sefcik, & Bradway, 2017). The criteria included: (1) students who had lived in the dormitory for at least one semester; (2) students who had participated in a four-day holiday period outside the dormitory; and (3) students who were willing to complete questionnaires and provide information regarding digital device use and spiritual activities during the holiday period.

From the questionnaire respondents, five students were selected as key informants for in-depth interviews. Informants were selected based on variations in response characteristics to represent different patterns of digital use and spiritual adjustment during the holiday period. This approach was used to obtain richer qualitative data and enable comparison of behavioral patterns among students (Michael Quinn Patton, 2015).

Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentation. First, a Google Form-based questionnaire was administered to identify patterns of digital device use during the holiday period. The questionnaire assessed indicators related to daily gadget use duration, types of digital activities, sleep pattern changes, consistency of obligatory worship practices, sunnah worship activities, learning focus, and students' perceptions of academic readiness after returning to the dormitory. Online questionnaires were used to facilitate efficient and systematic data collection (Evans & Mathur, 2018).

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five selected informants to explore students' experiences regarding digital distractions during the holiday period. The interviews focused on changes in worship habits, strategies for managing digital device use, the influence of the family environment on spiritual discipline, and students' adaptation after returning to the boarding school system. The semi-structured format enabled researchers to explore participants' responses while maintaining alignment with the research objectives (Steinar Kvale & Svend Brinkmann, 2015).

Third, observations were conducted after students returned to the boarding school environment. The observations focused on worship discipline, participation in formal learning activities, morning academic engagement, learning concentration, and involvement in dormitory development activities. These observations were used to identify patterns of spiritual and academic adjustment after the holiday period.

Fourth, documentation was analyzed to support and verify the research findings. The documents included boarding school administrative records, dormitory activity schedules, worship attendance records, questionnaire summaries, and field notes. These documents served as supporting evidence for the interpretation of the collected data.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Johnny Saldaña, 2018). During data reduction, relevant information was selected, categorized, and organized according to the research focus, including patterns of spiritual neglect, digital device use, and the restoration of discipline after returning to the boarding environment.

The reduced data were then presented through descriptive narratives, simple percentage tables, and thematic categorization of interview findings. This process facilitated the identification of relationships among findings and the interpretation of students' behavioral patterns during the holiday period and the transition after returning to the boarding school.

The final stage involved drawing conclusions through continuous verification using source triangulation. Triangulation was conducted by comparing questionnaire results, interview findings, observation data, and documentation to ensure consistency and credibility of the findings (Norman K. Denzin, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Ethically, the study was conducted after obtaining consent from all participants. Student identities were kept confidential, and all collected data were used solely for academic purposes. The data collection process was also conducted without disrupting students' learning activities or dormitory routines.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Intensity of Digital Device Use During the Holiday Period

Based on the results of a questionnaire on 34 boarding school-based Madrasah Aliyah students, data was obtained that the intensity of using digital devices during the holiday period was relatively high. As many as 47% of respondents used digital devices for more than six hours per day, 24% used devices for four to six hours per day, 18% used for two to four hours per day, and only 12% used less than two hours per day.

Table 1. Intensity of Digital Device Use During the Holiday Period

Duration of Use	Number of Students	Percentage
> 6 hours	16	47%
4–6 hours	8	24%
2–4 hours	6	18%
< 2 hours	4	12%

This data shows that most students experience increased digital exposure while outside the boarding school environment. The high duration of smartphone use in adolescents correlates with an increased risk of self-control disorders and digital dependence (Crowhurst & Hosseinzadeh, 2024).

Intensive use of digital devices is also known to increase symptoms of cognitive distraction and nomophobia, which is anxiety when individuals are unable to access their digital devices (Oraison & Wilson, 2024).

In the context of *boarding schools*, this increase shows that the control of the use of technology in some students still rests on external regulations of the institution, not fully internalized as personal control (Zimmerman, 2008).

Decrease in the Quality of Worship During the Holiday Period

As many as 52.9% of students reported experiencing a decrease in the quality of worship during the holiday period. This decline is not always in the form of abandoning the obligatory prayer, but more in the form of delays in the implementation of prayers, a decrease in solemnity, a decrease in the intensity of recitation, and a weakening of the consistency of sunnah worship. Dominant factors include:

1. excessive use of gadgets;
2. changes in sleep patterns;
3. reduced external supervision;
4. weak self-regulation.

These findings show that spiritual neglect is not solely due to weak religiosity, but is also influenced by changes in the structure of social discipline. Consistent religious habits are known to play an important role in building students' spiritual *self-control*. When the habituation structure is broken, disciplinary behavior tends to weaken (Putri, Hamdanah, & Luthfi, 2024).

The modern digital domestic space also presents a significant spiritual distraction for Muslim youth through the dominance of social media and screen consumption culture (Larson, 2024).

1. Recovery of Study Focus After Returning to Boarding School

The majority of students show a study focus score of 4–5 after returning to *boarding school*. This shows that *boarding schools* have a restorative function in restoring spiritual and academic rhythms. Collective religiosity and self-regulation are known to have a significant contribution to boarding school students' adaptation to a structured life (Triyuliasari & Mubarak, 2024).

A curriculum based on spiritual intelligence is also considered effective in accelerating the restoration of emotional stability and student learning orientation (Saliyo et al., 2024). These findings show that *boarding schools* are not just formal educational institutions, but psychospiritual rehabilitation ecosystems against digital disruption.

2. In-Depth Interview Findings

Informant 1 — F (medium digital vulnerable)

When asked about the influence of cellphone use on worship during the holidays, the informant explained:

"At home, I feel more free to use my cellphone. Usually after Ishya, the intention is only to open social media or play games for a while, but it often continues until night. Sometimes it was past one o'clock. As a result, it is difficult to wake up at dawn even though it has been built by parents. So worship is a bit less than the time on board."

Academic Analysis

This answer shows that the freedom of digital access without external control causes disruption of the rhythm of worship through changes in sleep patterns. These findings support a study by Crowhurst and Hosseinzadeh (2024) on the association between smartphone exposure at night and adolescent biological rhythm disorders.

Informant 2 - ARS (high digital vulnerability)

"At home, there are no restrictions like boarding. So if you already have a cellphone, you like to forget about time. At first, it was open for a while, but the app kept moving around. When you realize it's been a long time, sometimes you become late for prayer or lazy to study."

Academic Analysis

This statement shows a digital distraction mechanism that directly lowers *self-regulation*. This is in line with the findings of Oraison and Wilson (2024) on the effect of *app-switching compulsivity* on focus attenuation.

Informant 3 - ARK (Responsive)

"During the holidays, the use of cellphones has increased. But when I returned to boarding I was immediately helped because the schedule was organized again. There are joint activities, so it's easier to get disciplined back."

Academic Analysis

This answer demonstrates the restorative function of the boarding system through collective control and structured habituation.

Informant 4 - MA (stable)

"I try to keep using the same pattern as in boarding. My cellphone is limited by myself. Because they are used to being disciplined in the dormitory, so they are also maintained at home."

Academic Analysis

This statement indicates the successful internalization of spiritual discipline. Self-control is no longer entirely dependent on external regulation.

Informant 5 - BA (stable reflective)

"Not always. If used wisely, it actually helps. I sometimes use it to find study materials or listen to studies. The important thing is to be able to manage the time."

Academic Analysis

This answer shows mature spiritual digital literacy. Informants are able to place technology as a productive instrument, not a source of distraction.

3. Academic Analysis

The findings of this study show that *the boarding school environment* functions as an ecosystem of religious habituation that is effective in restoring students' spiritual rhythms after experiencing digital disruption during the holiday period. Digital dependency is known to develop when external controls are weakened and individuals do not yet have mature internal control mechanisms in place (Li & Yang, 2024).

This phenomenon shows that the spiritual development of boarding students is not enough to depend solely on institutional control. It is necessary to strengthen the internalization of values through spiritual digital literacy programs that emphasize:

- 1) digital self-regulation skills;
- 2) reflective awareness in the use of technology;
- 3) etika digital Islami;
- 4) Synergy of boarding school with parents during the holiday period.

Thus, Islamic education in the digital era must be able to form internal spiritual resilience so that students' religious discipline remains stable even outside the boarding school environment.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that digital device use during the holiday period significantly influenced changes in the spiritual rhythm of boarding school-based Madrasah Aliyah students. The high intensity of digital device use, particularly at night, was associated with disrupted sleep patterns, reduced sleep quality, and decreased concentration during worship activities. These changes did not always appear as complete neglect of religious obligations but were reflected in reduced devotion, delayed prayer performance, decreased consistency in Qur'an recitation, and weakened engagement in sunnah worship practices that had previously been established through habituation in the dormitory environment.

The findings also indicate that spiritual neglect in the digital era was not solely related to students' individual levels of religiosity but was closely associated with changes in the social structures that supported their spiritual habits. During their time in the boarding school environment, students followed a structured educational system characterized by collective schedules, continuous supervision, positive social control, and a religious atmosphere that consistently reinforced spiritual discipline. When this structure was reduced during the holiday period, some students experienced difficulties in independently maintaining their worship discipline.

Nevertheless, most students were able to restore their spiritual rhythm and learning focus within a relatively short period after returning to the boarding school environment. This

recovery occurred through mechanisms of collective habituation, strengthened social support, and a religious environment that encouraged the reactivation of students' spiritual awareness. These findings confirm that boarding schools function not only as formal educational institutions but also as restorative environments that support the reconstruction of students' spiritual and academic balance after periods of digital disruption.

This study also identified variations in students' adaptability to digital distractions. Some students continued to depend on external regulation to manage digital device use, while others demonstrated moderate adaptability or had internalized spiritual discipline that enabled them to maintain stable religious practices outside the dormitory environment. These variations indicate that the effectiveness of boarding school education in developing internal spiritual resilience may differ among students.

Based on these findings, this study highlights the importance of integrating spiritual-based digital literacy into the boarding school education system. Digital literacy in Islamic education should not be limited to technical competence in using technology but should also include ethical awareness, self-regulation skills, management of digital impulses, and the constructive use of technology to support academic and spiritual development. Furthermore, active collaboration among schools, dormitories, and parents is essential for maintaining students' spiritual habits, particularly during holiday periods.

This study was limited by the number of respondents and the focus on a single boarding school institution; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all dormitory-based madrasah contexts in Indonesia. Further research involving broader samples and diverse methodological approaches is recommended to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students' spiritual dynamics in the digital era.

Thus, Islamic education in the digital era faces the challenge of not only developing compliance through institutional control but also fostering internal spiritual resilience that enables students to maintain religious values across different social contexts. Boarding schools have considerable potential to achieve this goal by integrating traditional spiritual guidance with adaptive digital literacy strategies that respond to contemporary challenges.

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