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The Concept of Religious Character Education from the Perspectives of Buya Hamka and KH Ahmad Dahlan and Its Implications for Early Childhood Education in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the conceptual framework of Buya Hamka's and KH. Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts on religious character education for early childhood in the digital era. Using a qualitative library research approach with hermeneutic analysis, this research examines the primary works of both scholars and contemporary academic literature. The findings reveal that Hamka's thought emphasizes the spiritual dimension centered on tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul), faith awareness, and the cultivation of inner morality as a moral safeguard amid digital disruption. Meanwhile, Dahlan's thought focuses on Qur'anic social praxis through the values of amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, rationality, and social responsibility in the ethical use of technology. The synthesis of both perspectives results in a religious character education model built upon three dimensions: spiritual, socio-rational, and digital adaptability. This model underscores the integration of faith, social ethics, and Islamic digital literacy as the foundation for early childhood education relevant to the moral challenges of the digital age. The study contributes to the development of an integrative Islamic education theory and provides implications for designing PAUD curricula based on adaptive religious values.

Keywords: *Religious Character, Education, Early Childhood, Digital Era*

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of digital globalisation in the twenty-first century has brought about highly significant changes in the field of education, particularly in the context of early childhood character formation. The digital era presents a new reality in which children no longer learn solely through direct interaction with their social environment, but also through digital media such as smartphones, smart televisions, and online platforms including YouTube and TikTok Kids (Herabadi, 2025). Data from We Are Social and Hootsuite (2024) indicate that more than 74% of Indonesian children aged 5-12 use digital devices for at least two hours per day, with the majority of this time spent watching



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entertainment videos or playing online games (Pratama, 2024). On the one hand, this reflects the increasing digital literacy of children from an early age; on the other hand, it raises concerns regarding the decline of social interaction, empathy, and the internalisation of moral and religious values.

The results of preliminary observations conducted by the researcher in several Early Childhood Education (PAUD) institutions in Sleman and Probolinggo Regencies in 2024 indicate that more than 60% of children exhibit a tendency to imitate behaviours or language acquired from digital media, including content that is inconsistent with religious norms and local cultural values (Masyhuri & Adawiyah, 2024). Early childhood educators reported difficulties in guiding children to focus on fundamental moral values such as politeness, mutual assistance, and awareness of religious practice, as children's attention tends to be absorbed by digital content that is instant and superficial in nature (Padila, 2024). One teacher noted that "children today are more familiar with animated characters than with short verses of the Qur'an." This phenomenon illustrates a crisis in the internalisation of religious values in early childhood, which in the long term has the potential to erode the spiritual and moral identity of the younger Muslim generation.

This issue is important to investigate because religious character education constitutes the primary foundation for the formation of a civilised human being (*insān kāmil*) within the perspective of Islamic education. Early childhood represents a critical period in the development of moral and spiritual personality, as this stage involves intensive processes of imitation and value internalisation (Muliawati & Setiasih, 2024). Islamic education emphasises that moral values (*akhlāq*) should be instilled through role modelling and habituation, as articulated by Al-Ghazālī, who stated that "a child is a trust given to parents; his heart is pure like a pearl, ready to accept whatever is engraved upon it" (Maghfiroh, 2024). However, within the digital reality, the process of character formation has become increasingly complex, as the influence of the virtual environment is often stronger than direct guidance from teachers or parents.

In this context, the ideas of Buya Hamka and KH Ahmad Dahlan are highly relevant for re-examination. Buya Hamka, through his works such as *Lembaga Budi* and *Tasawuf Modern*, emphasised the importance of balance between reason and the heart in the formation of religious character (Salsabilla et al., 2024). He argued that education should not merely aim to develop intellectual capacity, but also to cultivate spiritual purity through faith, exemplary conduct, and moral character. Meanwhile, KH Ahmad Dahlan, through his vision of educational reform within Muhammadiyah, viewed education as a means of shaping faithful individuals who are active, dynamic, and rational (Mukhtarom, 2019). He stressed the integration of religious knowledge and worldly sciences, as well as the importance of actualising the teachings of the Qur'an in social life. Together, these two figures offer an educational paradigm that is highly relevant for addressing the challenges of the digital era—namely, how to foster children's religious character while integrating Islamic moral values within an increasingly technology-driven world.



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Although numerous studies have examined Buya Hamka's ideas on moral education and modern Sufism (Yusuf & Kuswandi, 2023), as well as KH Ahmad Dahlan's thought on Qur'anic social education through the values of *al-Mā'ūn* (Agustiar & Amalia, 2024), these studies have generally remained separate and have not been integrated into a comprehensive framework specifically oriented towards the digitalisation of early childhood education. Previous research has indeed explained the individual contributions of each figure to character education; however, no study has yet combined Hamka's spiritual dimension with Dahlan's socio-rational dimension into a unified model of character education capable of addressing the moral challenges of the digital era. Moreover, no existing research has systematically formulated the concepts of inner moral control (spiritual) and social moral action (ethical-digital) as foundational elements in the formation of religious character in early childhood. This conceptual gap is addressed by the present study through the development of a synthetic model based on the integrated perspectives of Hamka and Dahlan, aimed at formulating a paradigm of religious character education that is relevant for the digital generation.

The gap between ideal conditions and empirical realities is clearly evident. Ideally, early childhood education should serve as a medium for the deep internalisation of spiritual, moral, and social values, as articulated in the Kurikulum Merdeka for Early Childhood Education (Kemendikbudristek, 2023), which positions religious and moral values as core elements of the Pancasila Student Profile (Udin et al., n.d.). However, in practice, attention to religious character education is often overshadowed by demands for early digital literacy and academic skills. This situation underscores the urgency of the present study, which seeks to re-examine the conceptual foundations of religious character education by drawing upon the thought of classical Indonesian Islamic figures, in order to enable its adaptive application within a modern digital context. Accordingly, this research does not merely remain at the level of conceptual analysis of Buya Hamka's and KH Ahmad Dahlan's ideas, but also examines their implications for early childhood education practices that are responsive to the challenges of the digital era.

2. Literature Review

Recent studies on religious character education over the past decade indicate a paradigm shift from traditional moralistic approaches to more integrative models that encompass spiritual, social, and digital dimensions. Several researchers (Yusuf & Kuswandi, 2023; Zahra et al., 2022) emphasise that religious values cannot be imparted solely through verbal instruction, but must be internalised through habitual practice and contextual role-modelling, particularly in relation to the digital realities faced by young children. Within this framework, religious character education is understood as an effort to cultivate faith awareness and moral self-regulation through Islamic digital literacy, guiding children towards ethical behaviour in virtual spaces. This view reinforces Hamka's assertion (in Modern Sufism) that technological advancement, in the absence of



inner purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*), risks producing an intellectually capable generation devoid of spiritual direction.

Furthermore, recent studies have highlighted the importance of the social dimension in character education, as envisioned by KH. Ahmad Dahlan. Through the concepts of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* and his interpretation of Surah Al-Ma'un, Dahlan emphasised the role of education as a means of social da'wah, fostering moral sensitivity and empathy towards others (Agustiar & Amalia, 2024; Sutarna et al., 2022). Research by (Mangunwibawa et al., 2025) and (Ushie Uswatun Hasanah et al., 2024) affirms that, in the digital era, these Qur'anic social values can be translated into digital media ethics, encouraging children to engage positively and responsibly within online environments. Thus, Dahlan's thought provides a conceptual foundation for integrating religious values with rationality in early childhood education, which increasingly demands adaptive competencies in response to modern technological developments.

On the other hand, current scholarly debates on religious character education centre on how spiritual and social values can be harmonised with digital competencies. Several experts argue that traditional morality-based education is no longer adequate in addressing the challenges of the digital age (Chairunnisa et al., 2025; Nufus, 2021). However, an integrative approach, developed from the synthesis of Hamka's and Dahlan's thought, offers a progressive conceptual solution: spirituality serves as the foundation for digital self-regulation, while social rationality provides the direction for educational praxis that fosters public ethics. This model demonstrates that Islamic digital literacy is not merely a matter of technological proficiency, but also a process of cultivating moral awareness rooted in faith and character.

Thus, the position of this study lies in its attempt to address a theoretical gap within contemporary Islamic education literature by synthesising two classical paradigms-Hamka's Sufi spirituality and Dahlan's Qur'anic social rationalism-into a framework for religious character education that is relevant to the digital era. This study not only expands the theoretical horizon of integrative Islamic education, but also reinforces the idea that Islamic digital literacy can serve as a new medium for shaping the character of young children who are faithful, morally upright, and adaptable to technological transformation. With this conceptual foundation, the research presents a robust scholarly position while contributing to 21st-century Islamic education discourse, which demands a balance between faith, reason, and technology.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of library research, as its focus lies in the exploration, interpretation, and reconstruction of the ideas of Buya Hamka and KH Ahmad Dahlan within the context of religious character education for early childhood in the digital era. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the texts and ideas of both figures, thereby producing an understanding that is not merely descriptive but



also analytical and reflective. Drawing on Moleong's perspective, qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena holistically through critical dialogue between the researcher and the object of study; accordingly, the researcher functions as the primary instrument in selecting, interpreting, and synthesising ideas contained within various literary sources (Juita et al., 2025). The analytical process is conducted within a hermeneutic framework, enabling the thought of Hamka and Dahlan to be examined not only in its historical context but also to be recontextualised in relation to the dynamics of contemporary digital education.

The data sources employed in this study consist of both primary and secondary data. The primary data comprise the original works of the two figures, such as *Lembaga Budi* and *Tasawuf Modern* by Buya Hamka, as well as speeches, instructional notes, and early Muhammadiyah documents that articulate KH Ahmad Dahlan's ideas on integrative education, including his interpretation of al-Mā'ūn as a foundation for educational praxis. Secondary data are drawn from scholarly articles, books, and recent research findings related to religious character education, the digitalisation of education, theories of value internalisation, moral development theory, and classical Islamic education. These sources were collected from reputable academic databases, including Scopus, SINTA, DOAJ, and ScienceDirect. Data selection was conducted rigorously based on substantive relevance and scholarly credibility in order to support a comprehensive conceptual analysis.

Data collection was conducted through documentary analysis following three main stages: literature identification, critical reading, and thematic categorisation. At the identification stage, the researcher selected relevant primary and secondary sources (Nurhayati et al., 2024). Critical reading was then undertaken to unpack the arguments, contextual background, and philosophical structure of the figures' thought, while thematic categorisation was employed to organise key ideas into themes such as moral conduct (akhlāq), religious values, Qur'anic social education, and their relevance to digital early childhood education. The final stage involved a synthesis of the literature, integrating the conceptual findings into a coherent and consistent analytical framework.

The data analysis in this study employs a content analysis method with a descriptive-interpretative orientation in order to uncover the deeper meanings and value structures embedded in the works of the two figures (Djiwandono & Yulianto, 2023). By adapting the model proposed by Miles and Huberman, the analytical process involves data reduction to filter relevant information, data display through conceptual classification, and iterative conclusion drawing to ensure interpretative consistency and accuracy (Rahman, 2025). The analysis is conducted hermeneutically to guide an understanding of the relationship between the Islamic educational values articulated by Hamka and Dahlan and the challenges of character formation in early childhood amidst the rapid development of digital technology.

The trustworthiness of the data is ensured through source and theoretical triangulation, repeated readings, and peer debriefing with supervisors and academic



colleagues. Source triangulation is conducted by comparing primary works with secondary interpretations in order to ensure consistency of meaning (Anzaikhan, 2025). Theoretical triangulation is employed to examine the alignment of the analysis with value theory, moral theory, and classical Islamic education, thereby reducing the potential for interpretative bias (Sulaiman, 2025). Repeated readings are undertaken to strengthen the objectivity of interpretation, while peer debriefing is used to evaluate argumentative coherence and analytical accuracy (Sukmana et al., 2025). Through these methodological procedures, the study produces findings that are valid, reliable, and possess adequate conceptual robustness.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. The Concept of Religious Character Education According to Buya Hamka

Buya Hamka's concept of religious character education is firmly rooted in the cultivation of the heart, faith, and moral character through a modern Sufi approach that emphasises spiritual purity (Prasetya & Cholily, 2021). In his work *Tasawuf Modern*, Hamka asserts that genuine education must nurture the human being both outwardly and inwardly in order to achieve a balanced and resilient spiritual and moral life (Nufus, 2021). The principle of spiritual purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) is realised through the habituation of reflective thinking, self-introspection, and the development of positive relationships within the social environment (Istiqomah et al., 2024). Hamka further stresses the importance of equilibrium between rational and spiritual dimensions through values such as *qanā'ah* (contentment) and sincerity, which shape a moderate and ethical character (Hakim & Fanani, 2021). Accordingly, religious character education in Hamka's perspective does not merely aim to develop intellectual intelligence, but seeks to cultivate spiritual awareness that underpins moral and social action.

In Hamka's thought, the formation of religious character is realised through three principal pillars: exemplary conduct, habituation, and purification of the heart (Rofi et al., 2019). Hamka maintains that the exemplary behaviour of teachers and parents constitutes the primary means of children's moral education from an early age, as moral values are more effectively internalised through concrete examples than through verbal instruction alone (Chairunnisa et al., 2025). The process of habituation is carried out through repeated actions that cultivate religious values such as honesty, responsibility, and simplicity (Yusuf & Kuswandi, 2023). Meanwhile, purification of the heart represents the core of spiritual education, enabling individuals to control their desires and to build moral integrity amidst the complexities of the digital age (Zahra et al., 2022). Accordingly, the formation of religious character from Hamka's perspective is integral in nature, encompassing affective, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions.

Within the context of the digital era, Buya Hamka's thought demonstrates strong relevance to efforts aimed at strengthening moral filters and self-control in relation to



digital content (Rofi et al., 2019). Hamka's values of modern Sufism emphasise that technological progress must be balanced by clarity of heart and spiritual awareness in order to prevent individuals from falling into immoral behaviour or the consumption of destructive information (Syefriyeni & Nasrudin, 2023). Religious character education grounded in faith and moral conduct, as articulated by Hamka, functions as a moral safeguard that trains digital users to engage selectively and responsibly in online interactions (Gozali et al., 2022). Through the internalisation of purified inner values, strong faith, and noble character, religious character education based on Buya Hamka's thought remains highly relevant as a strategy for the humanisation of technology in a digital era marked by profound moral challenges (Erwin et al., 2024).

4.2. The Concept of Character Education in the Thought of KH Ahmad Dahlan

KH Ahmad Dahlan's thought on character education is rooted in the practical application of the Qur'an, particularly Sūrat al-Mā'ūn, which emphasises social concern and moral responsibility as the core of religiosity. According to Dahlan, education should not remain at the cognitive level alone, but must be implemented through concrete actions that reflect faith and righteous deeds (*īmān and 'amal ṣāliḥ*) (Agustiar & Amalia, 2024). The principle of *amr ma'rūf nahy munkar* serves as the foundation of social ethics, requiring learners to be actively engaged in promoting goodness and preventing wrongdoing within their communities (Adi Haironi & Dibi Nicklany, 2024). Accordingly, education in Dahlan's view functions as an instrument of *da'wah* that shapes pious individuals while simultaneously nurturing agents of social transformation (Diniy & Wantini, 2023). This perspective demonstrates the integration of spiritual values and social praxis within a single educational framework oriented towards a balance of faith, action, and social responsibility.

Furthermore, KH Ahmad Dahlan's concept of character education emphasises the integration of social values, compassion, and rationality. Dahlan rejected the dichotomy between religious knowledge and general sciences; for him, both must be synergised in order to form individuals who are faithful while also capable of critical thinking (Sugiati, 2022). Through a rational approach to Islamic teachings, learners are encouraged to understand the meaning of worship contextually, so that religious values serve as a foundation for the development of science and humanity (Fidayanti & Tukinah, 2020). In this regard, education according to Dahlan is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but also a process of internalising social values that foster empathy and social responsibility (Sutarna et al., 2022). This integrative concept establishes the moral and intellectual foundation of early childhood, enabling children to live ethically amidst ongoing social change.

In terms of its relevance to the digital era, KH Ahmad Dahlan's thought remains highly *aktual* as a foundation for children's religious character education. The utilisation of technology should be directed towards cultivating ethical values, empathy, and



responsibility in the use of digital media (Ushie Uswatun Hasanah et al., 2024). The principle of *amr ma'rūf nahy munkar* can serve as a moral guideline for children in selecting and disseminating beneficial information (Salsabila et al., 2025). Moreover, the rational and contextual approach to the Qur'an advocated by Dahlan encourages the strengthening of value-based digital literacy, enabling children not merely to become consumers of technology, but also moral agents in the virtual sphere (Al Fithri et al., n.d.). Accordingly, Dahlan's educational values are highly relevant in guiding the digital generation to become morally upright, knowledgeable, and spiritually as well as socially responsible individuals.

4.3. Convergences and Divergences in the Thought of the Two Figures

The thought of Buya Hamka and KH Ahmad Dahlan shares a fundamental similarity in its orientation towards religious character education centred on the formation of faith and moral character. Both figures emphasise the importance of exemplary conduct and habituation as effective methods for instilling religious values from an early age (Yusuf & Kuswandi, 2023). In Buya Hamka's view, character education aims to cultivate individuals with deep faith through the nurturing of the heart and the purification of the soul (Nufus, 2021). Meanwhile, Dahlan asserts that faith must be manifested in social behaviour that reflects concern for others, as emphasised in his interpretation of *Sūrat al-Mā'ūn* (Agustiar & Amalia, 2024). Accordingly, the shared orientation of both thinkers lies in their ultimate objective: the formation of faithful individuals with noble character through concrete practice in everyday life.

The principal difference between the two figures lies in their respective approaches to character education. Buya Hamka places greater emphasis on the spiritual and inner dimensions through a modern Sufi approach aimed at purifying the heart and cultivating individual moral consciousness (Hakim & Fanani, 2021). For Hamka, education serves as a means of nurturing a purified soul and fostering a direct relationship with God. In contrast, KH Ahmad Dahlan prioritises the social and practical dimensions of education, in which Islamic teachings are translated into concrete actions in the form of social concern and advocacy for the disadvantaged (Safitri Ani & Dodi Irawan, 2023). He maintains that true faith acquires meaning only when it is realised through social action. This divergence in orientation highlights two complementary trajectories of Islamic education: the contemplative and the active.

In terms of educational methodology, Buya Hamka places greater emphasis on the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) through self-reflection and inner cultivation, whereas KH Ahmad Dahlan highlights the habituation of measurable and rational social action. Hamka regards exemplary conduct as a reflection of the teacher's spirituality, which in turn inspires learners to develop noble character (*akhlāq*) (Istiqomah et al., 2024). By contrast, KH Ahmad Dahlan stresses action-based learning through social practices such as mutual assistance, literacy education, and community empowerment



(Al Fithri et al., n.d.). Nevertheless, both figures agree that early childhood education should begin with moral habituation and tangible role modelling in everyday life (Chairunnisa et al., 2025).

The synthesis of the two thinkers' ideas indicates that ideal religious character is formed through a combination of spiritual-inner cultivation and practical social action. Education in Hamka's perspective develops inner self-control as the moral foundation of individual conduct, while education in Dahlan's view nurtures social responsibility as an expression of active faith (Gozali et al., 2022). The integration of these two approaches has the potential to produce a model of character education that addresses both personal development and social engagement simultaneously (Erwin et al., 2024). Accordingly, early childhood learners are not only able to comprehend religious values at a theoretical level, but are also capable of implementing them within concrete social contexts (Kumalasari & Wibowo, 2021).

The relevance of the synthesis of Buya Hamka's and KH Ahmad Dahlan's thought to the digital era lies in its emphasis on balance between spiritual self-control and social ethics in the use of technology. Hamka's spiritual values shape a moral filter against negative digital content, while Dahlan's social values guide children to engage with technology in a responsible and productive manner (Syefriyeni & Nasrudin, 2023). Religious character education in the digital era must therefore integrate inner awareness, social empathy, and technological literacy, enabling children to adapt to digital environments without losing their moral compass (Mangunwibawa et al., 2025). By combining Hamka's spirituality with Dahlan's social rationality, a paradigm of religious character education emerges that is relevant, contextual, and responsive to the challenges of the digital age (Zahra et al., 2022).

4.4. The Relevance of Buya Hamka's and KH Ahmad Dahlan's Thought in Early Childhood Education in the Digital Era

The thought of Buya Hamka and KH Ahmad Dahlan remains highly relevant to the formation of religious character in early childhood within the digital era, particularly in fostering moral and spiritual awareness in relation to the use of technology. Buya Hamka emphasises the importance of inner cultivation and purity of heart as a moral safeguard against the unrestricted flow of information in the digital sphere (Nufus, 2021). Meanwhile, KH Ahmad Dahlan asserts that education must be grounded in Qur'anic social values so that children develop social responsibility and ethical awareness in digital interaction (Agustiar & Amalia, 2024). Together, these perspectives provide a foundational basis for the development of a digital religious education model that instils self-regulation and social concern from an early age (Zahra et al., 2022).

Within the digital context, Hamka's inner spiritual values can be applied through the strengthening of children's spiritual awareness regarding the wise use of digital media. Habituation in selecting beneficial content and rejecting harmful material represents a



practical implementation of spiritual education (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) in the virtual realm (Hakim & Fanani, 2021). Education that emphasises purity of heart fosters internal moral awareness capable of functioning as an “ethical digital filter” for children (Istiqomah et al., 2024). Accordingly, Hamka’s spiritual values play a crucial role in developing moral resilience against the negative impacts of digitalisation, such as exposure to violent content and the erosion of moral values (Yusuf & Kuswandi, 2023).

Meanwhile, KH Ahmad Dahlan makes a significant contribution to the social dimension of digital character education. He emphasises the importance of *amr ma’rūf nahy munkar* in all aspects of life, including the digital sphere, so that children become accustomed to positive behaviour and ethical interaction in online spaces (Safitri Ani & Dodi Irawan, 2023). Qur’anic values such as social concern, honesty, and responsibility serve as guiding principles in fostering responsible media awareness (Sutarna et al., 2022). The relevance of Dahlan’s thought in this context demonstrates that religious character education in the digital era must be capable of building a strong connection between faith and digital social action (Syefriyeni & Nasrudin, 2023).

A responsive digital religious education model can be developed through three main strategies: value habituation, exemplary practice, and ethical technology governance. Value habituation plays a role in shaping children’s consistent behaviour in relation to digital ethics, while the exemplary conduct of teachers and parents provides concrete models for children to emulate in their use of technology (Chairunnisa et al., 2025). Ethical technology governance, meanwhile, requires supervision and the reinforcement of digital moral values aligned with Islamic principles (Ushie Uswatun Hasanah et al., 2024). The implementation of this model enables religious character education to operate dynamically and contextually in response to the rapid development of digital technology (Mangunwibawa et al., 2025).

The synthesis of Hamka’s and Dahlan’s thought produces a paradigm of early childhood education grounded in a balanced integration of digital spirituality and social responsibility. Hamka’s spiritual values strengthen self-regulation in relation to digital content, while Dahlan’s social values cultivate empathy and responsibility in online interaction (Gozali et al., 2022). These two approaches can be combined into a digital religiosity model for early childhood that functions to develop a balanced ethical and spiritual awareness (Al Fithri et al., n.d.). Accordingly, the thought of Hamka and Dahlan remains highly relevant as a conceptual foundation for religious character education in an era of rapid technological advancement (Zahra et al., 2022).

4.5. Conceptual Model (Research Findings)

The conceptual model of religious character education for early childhood based on the thought of Buya Hamka and KH Ahmad Dahlan emphasises a synergy between spiritual formation and social-moral development within the digital context. The spiritual dimension in Hamka’s perspective is rooted in faith awareness, sincerity, and



moral consciousness of the heart, which function as an inner moral foundation for confronting the ethical challenges of the digital era (Nufus, 2021; Yusuf & Kuswandi, 2023). Hamka asserts that character formation must begin with *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) so that technology does not become a source of moral degradation (Zahra et al., 2022). Consequently, values of faith and sincerity operate as mechanisms of digital self-regulation grounded in spiritual awareness rather than merely in external social norms.

Meanwhile, the social-rational dimension articulated by KH Ahmad Dahlan is grounded in an understanding of *al-Mā'ūn* as an Islamic social ethic that cultivates compassion, responsibility, and proper conduct (*adab*) in interactions within modern society, including the digital sphere (Khoirudin et al., 2020; Putra & Arifin, 2024; Shodikin et al., 2025). In the context of early childhood, these social values are translated into patterns of habituation that promote empathy, sharing, and digital ethics, thereby distancing children from consumptive and intolerant behaviour in online environments. This approach fosters a rational character rooted in Qur'anic principles while remaining adaptive to the demands of modernity.

Furthermore, the adaptive digital dimension serves as a complementary component of the Hamka–Dahlan model by integrating Islamic digital literacy, value-based supervision, and ethical dialogue among children, teachers, and parents. This concept aligns with the integrative educational vision of both Hamka and Dahlan, which seeks to harmonise faith with technological advancement (Chairunnisa et al., 2025; Mangunwibawa et al., 2025; Ushie Uswatun Hasanah et al., 2024). Accordingly, digital religious character education does not merely impose restrictions, but actively guides children to internalise Islamic values in their engagement with technology through exemplary conduct, value habituation, and ethical digital governance.

5. Conclusion

The thought of Buya Hamka and KH Ahmad Dahlan possesses strong conceptual relevance in shaping a paradigm of religious character education for early childhood in the digital era. Hamka emphasises spiritual formation through faith awareness, sincerity, and moral consciousness of the heart, while Dahlan highlights the importance of a Qur'anic social dimension that cultivates compassion and social responsibility. The synthesis of these perspectives gives rise to a renewed paradigm of Islamic education that integrates spirituality, social engagement, and digital adaptability in a harmonious manner. The Hamka-Dahlan-based model of religious character education provides a balance between internal moral control grounded in faith and conscience, and external social regulation expressed through action and digital responsibility. Within the context of early childhood education, this approach not only strengthens moral habituation and exemplary practice, but also extends the educational sphere into ethical digital literacy. Accordingly, the thought of both figures serves as a robust conceptual foundation for the



development of a modern Islamic education model that is responsive to the moral challenges posed by technological advancement.

It should be emphasised that the findings of this study are conceptual-implicative in nature, generated through critical analysis and synthesis of the thought of Buya Hamka and KH Ahmad Dahlan based on a comprehensive literature review, rather than through an empirically tested field-based model. Accordingly, the proposed model of religious character education functions as a conceptual framework and theoretical reference that may serve as a reflective foundation and guide for the development of early childhood education practices in the digital era.

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