

Reimagining Islamic Education through Digital Literacy and Bilingual Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how digital literacy and bilingual storytelling can contribute to transformative Islamic education for children of Indonesian migrant workers. Limited access to culturally relevant learning resources often hinders migrant children from receiving holistic Islamic education. To address this challenge, the study develops and explores digital learning resources that integrate bilingual narratives and interactive features designed to enhance engagement and comprehension while preserving religious and cultural values. Using a narrative inquiry approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and reflective accounts from children, parents, and teachers who engaged with the digital resources. Their stories provide insights into how digital literacy practices shape learning experiences, support bilingual development, and foster family involvement in Islamic education. Findings highlight that bilingual storytelling in digital formats not only improves accessibility and motivation but also strengthens identity formation and intergenerational learning within migrant communities. The study contributes to the discourse on digital literacy and bilingual education by presenting an evidence-based model of how narrative-driven resources can transform Islamic learning. It underscores the importance of technology-mediated storytelling as both a pedagogical tool and a bridge between cultural heritage, language development, and faith-based education in transnational contexts.

Keywords: Islamic education; digital literacy, bilingual storytelling; narrative inquiry; transformative learning

Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technologies has profoundly reshaped the landscape of Islamic education, compelling educators, and families to reconsider

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how faith, morality, and literacy are cultivated in a technologically mediated world. Within the last decade, digital platforms, mobile applications, and interactive storytelling tools have become integral components of educational practice, offering new modes for transmitting religious and cultural knowledge to younger generations. Scholars note that this digital turn in Islamic education represents not only a pedagogical transition but also a broader epistemic and cultural shift that redefines the relationships among knowledge, spirituality, and technology (Abubakari & Kalinaki, 2024; Restalia & Khasanah, 2025; Wajdi et al., 2025). Digital learning environments now serve as spaces for cultivating ethical sensibility, critical thinking, and compassion through multimodal and learner-centered design (Mashudi & Hilman, 2024; Maulana et al., 2025). This transformation underscores that technology can no longer be viewed as merely instrumental; rather, it functions as a moral and intellectual ecology that shapes how young Muslims engage with knowledge, language, and belief (Malizal, 2025; Rachman, 2025).

Within this new ecology, studies have highlighted that Islamic education mediated through digital technology has the potential to make learning more accessible, inclusive, and emotionally engaging for children. Digital storytelling, gamified learning, and interactive Qur'anic platforms enable moral and faith-based content to be communicated in forms that align with children's cognitive and affective development (Mariani et al., 2025; Purnama et al., 2022; Sulastri & Ismail, 2025). Research in early childhood education demonstrates that digital Islamic narratives can nurture children's moral awareness and curiosity when presented through compassionate and culturally meaningful storytelling (Ervina et al., 2025). Similarly, Mashudi & Hilman (2024) found that digital-based Islamic learning increases student engagement and deepens spiritual understanding by positioning learners as active meaning-makers rather than passive recipients. However, as Abubakari & Kalinaki (2024) argued, effective integration of technology in Islamic education requires digital competence, a balanced capacity that combines technical skills, ethical discernment, and spiritual reflection. Without such critical awareness, technology risks becoming a superficial medium rather than a transformative one.

Recent studies also emphasize the significance of moderation and cultural sensitivity in digital religious education. Afif & Dwijayanto (2021) demonstrated how the *NU Kids* application promotes moderate Islamic identities by embedding messages of tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect within children's digital literature. Their work illustrates how digital faith learning can counter polarizing narratives by creating gentle and emotionally resonant engagements with Islamic values. Complementary findings by Subandi et al. (2025) reveal that digital Islamic character education grounded in local wisdom can effectively address the moral crisis among youth when ethical content is integrated through interactive media. Together, these studies reinforce that digital Islamic education can function as a vehicle for promoting moderation, empathy, and peace when designed with pedagogical intentionality and aesthetic care. Yet, most of these initiatives have been developed in Indonesia's formal educational contexts, focusing on institutional curriculum design rather than lived, familial experiences of learning.

Parallel to these pedagogical innovations, an expanding body of research highlights the role of digital storytelling in promoting moral development, linguistic growth, and intercultural understanding. Puspitasari et al. (2022) found that Muslim youths who engaged in digital storytelling about peace developed empathy and reflective thinking, illustrating how narrative creation becomes a medium for ethical reasoning. Similarly, Kurniawan et al. (2024) proposed integrating Qur'anic frameworks into digital literacy curricula to align technological engagement with spiritual goals. These studies suggest that storytelling not only conveys religious teachings but also facilitates moral imagination and emotional resonance, allowing learners to internalize values through empathy and reflection. However, as noted by Khikmah & Ismail (2025), digital Qur'an applications are most effective when accompanied by bilingual explanations and contextualized examples that link faith with everyday experience. The intersection between digital storytelling and bilingual literacy thus emerges as a promising yet underexplored dimension in Islamic education.

In multilingual and multicultural societies, bilingual Islamic education plays a crucial role in sustaining linguistic heritage and religious identity simultaneously. For many Muslim families, the coexistence of Arabic, national, and foreign languages in learning contexts provides both a challenge and an opportunity for deeper meaning-making (Hidayatulloh & Afiyah, 2025; Umar et al., 2023). Bilingual storytelling enables learners to move fluidly between languages while negotiating moral concepts across cultural frameworks. Studies of digital literacy among madrasah students reveal that language alternation in religious learning fosters both intellectual flexibility and identity affirmation (Kurniawan et al., 2024; Maulana et al., 2025). Nevertheless, while bilingual approaches are increasingly recognized within classroom-based contexts, little is known about how these practices are enacted in family environments, especially among transnational or migrant communities where children navigate multiple linguistic and cultural systems.

At the same time, family participation is consistently shown to be central to the moral and emotional efficacy of Islamic digital learning. Parental involvement transforms digital media from a mere consumption tool into a dialogic space of reflection and togetherness (Mariani et al., 2025; Sulastri & Ismail, 2025). In domestic learning environments, children often experience digital Islamic stories not as isolated texts but as shared family events that foster affection, spiritual connection, and moral discussion. Yet, existing studies remain predominantly school-based, with limited focus on how digital faith learning unfolds in everyday family routines. This gap is particularly visible in studies of Indonesian migrant families, where the convergence of digital literacy, bilingualism, and faith-based education remains insufficiently explored. For children of migrant workers who grow up in multilingual, multicultural settings, digital storytelling could serve as a vital bridge linking religious understanding, emotional expression, and cultural continuity, a possibility that remains largely undocumented in current research (Purnama et al., 2022; Restalia & Khasanah, 2025; Wajdi et al., 2025).

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how digital literacy and bilingual storytelling reimagine Islamic education for the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Australia. Using a narrative inquiry approach, it examines

how children and parents engage with the Tarbiyah MAE application, an Islamic digital learning platform containing bilingual stories of the Prophets, Qur'anic verses, and moral lessons, and how these experiences shape faith learning, family interaction, and identity formation. By focusing on lived narratives rather than formal instruction, this research extends prior work on digital Islamic pedagogy and bilingual literacy into the underexplored realm of transnational family life. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How do digital literacy and bilingual storytelling reimagine Islamic education for the children of Indonesian migrant workers?

Method

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design to explore how digital literacy and bilingual storytelling reimagine Islamic education for the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Australia. Narrative inquiry was chosen to capture participants' lived experiences through their stories about engaging with digital learning materials, particularly the bilingual Islamic narratives available in the Tarbiyah MAE application, an educational platform integrating interactive animations, Qur'anic verses, and moral lessons in Indonesian and English following the framework outlined by (Barkhuizen et al., 2014.). Seven children aged four to eleven and their parents, all residing in Melbourne and surrounding areas, were selected purposively to represent varied bilingual abilities and digital literacy levels. Data were collected over four months through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and parents' reflective notes during and after storytelling sessions using Tarbiyah MAE. Observations focused on children's engagement and affective responses, while interviews and reflections captured parents' insights into how bilingual storytelling mediated faith learning, language use, and family interaction. All data were transcribed and analyzed inductively following the three stages of narrative inquiry, story collection, analysis, and retelling, supported by interpretative phenomenological and critical discourse analyses to explore emotional and linguistic dimensions of meaning-making. Credibility was ensured through data triangulation, member checking, and reflective memoing, while ethical procedures, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and pseudonym use, safeguarded participants' well-being. This methodological approach illuminated how digital storytelling within Tarbiyah MAE served as both an educational and relational space for fostering moral understanding, bilingual development, and family-based Islamic learning among migrant communities.

Results

This section presents the findings derived from the narrative inquiry conducted with seven Indonesian migrant families in Australia who interacted with bilingual digital Islamic stories embedded in the Tarbiyah MAE application. The participants, comprising children aged four to eleven and their parents, engaged with illustrated, narrated stories that conveyed Islamic moral teachings such as honesty, compassion, and perseverance. The analysis of observational

field notes, interviews, and reflective accounts revealed four salient themes: digital engagement and curiosity, bilingual comprehension and expression, moral and faith learning, and family connection and identity formation. To preserve confidentiality, all names presented here are pseudonyms.

Digital Engagement and Curiosity

Children demonstrated a high degree of engagement and emotional responsiveness toward the digital storytelling format. The multimodal features of the application, colorful visuals, animated characters, and gentle narration, elicited curiosity, and sustained attention throughout the sessions. In one story segment depicting a companion sharing his wealth to assist a person in need, several children responded spontaneously with verbal expressions of empathy. Rania (5), for instance, exclaimed,

“He’s kind! He helps!”

While her mother reflected that this was the first time her daughter asked why someone gave his money rather than just watching passively. The integration of visual and auditory elements appeared to facilitate affective connection. Hanif (8) repeatedly replayed scenes showing gratitude and joy, commenting,

“I want to see when he smiles again.”

Parents observed that such engagement differed from conventional media exposure, emphasizing that the children were emotionally attentive and interested in the reason behind the characters’ actions. Even in more solemn episodes, where a Prophet addressed people who rejected his message, children remained reflective rather than disengaged. Hanif whispered,

“He keeps calling them to pray to Allah,”

Suggesting early moral inference from the narrative. Parents noted that these digital environments allowed their children to attend to spiritual meaning without experiencing fear or didactic tension. The use of animation and bilingual text thereby functioned not merely as visual appeal but as a pedagogical affordance, transforming the act of viewing into interactive meaning-making. The children’s sustained focus and recurring questions indicated a deep affective involvement that extended beyond entertainment.

Bilingual Comprehension and Expression

The bilingual narration embedded within Tarbiyah MAE facilitated natural language negotiation between children and parents. Rather than relying on direct translation, families engaged in dialogic interpretation, shifting between Indonesian and English to clarify meanings. When encountering the phrase “a true companion of the Prophet, always by his side in good and hard times,” Zahra (9) asked the meaning of “hard times”. Her mother affirmed and expanded the explanation, contextualizing the moral significance of loyalty. These moments exemplified spontaneous translanguaging practices through which meaning was co-constructed across languages. The bilingual mode not only supported comprehension but also reinforced language awareness and emotional nuance.

Younger children, such as Fira (6), relied on Indonesian as a base for understanding faith-related terms introduced in English. Following the line “They worshiped idols they made with their own hands.” Parents frequently highlighted how the bilingual format enhanced both religious and linguistic competence. One father noted,

“He learns the word ‘forgiveness’ and understands it as something Allah loves.”

Parents also participated as co-learners, often replaying the English version for their own understanding, indicating a reciprocal learning process within the family. This translanguaging environment aligned language acquisition with emotional and spiritual literacy. The narratives thus functioned as mediational spaces where faith concepts were linguistically and affectively negotiated through intergenerational collaboration.

Moral and Faith Learning

The moral dimensions of the digital stories elicited significant reflection and value internalization among the children. Observational data revealed that moral comprehension was often linked to emotional empathy rather than cognitive instruction. When viewing a sequence portraying the companion liberating a person from oppression, Arka (7) commented,

“He gave his money because Allah likes it when we help.”

His mother reported that, afterward, he voluntarily set aside a portion of his allowance for charity. Such behavioral reflections demonstrate the process of embodied moral learning, in which ethical values are apprehended through affective identification with narrative characters. Similarly, during the depiction of a Prophet persevering despite ridicule, Hanif (8) remarked,

“They don’t listen, but he keeps trying.”

His mother linked this to his personal experiences, noting that he later said,

“I’ll keep doing the right thing even if my friends laugh.”

Parents emphasized that these moral insights differed from conventional moral instruction. Rather than being told what to do, children observed virtues enacted within emotionally meaningful contexts. One parent reflected,

“Through the story, they feel what patience means.”

These findings suggest that digital storytelling fostered affective moral cognition, enabling children to experience Islamic virtues as emotional realities rather than abstract ideals. The multimodal representation, soft narration, expressive imagery, and reflective pacing facilitated this moral internalization process by engaging both emotion and reflection simultaneously.

Family Connection and Identity Formation

The integration of digital storytelling into family routines strengthened intergenerational ties and affirmed shared cultural-religious identity. Parents

frequently described these sessions as “quiet time together” or “moments of peace.” Many families incorporated the activity into evening routines, often followed by discussion or prayer. One mother recounted,

“Every night my daughter says, ‘Let’s listen to the story again,’ and after that, we make dua together.”

Another parent reflected that the experience evoked nostalgia:

“It reminds me of my father telling stories back home. Now I do the same, but through this app.”

For migrant families navigating transnational contexts, these digital narratives became symbolic spaces of belonging. The simultaneous presence of Indonesian and English narration reflected their dual linguistic and cultural realities. “When we use Indonesian, it feels like home,” one mother said. “When we use English, it feels like growing here.”

Children, in turn, displayed emerging confidence in articulating Islamic narratives bilingually. Siti (11) stated,

“I can tell my friends about the Prophet in English,” an expression her parents interpreted as both linguistic achievement and identity affirmation.

Through shared engagement with digital faith stories, parents and children collectively enacted what may be termed transcultural spiritual continuity, the preservation and reinterpretation of Islamic identity within a diasporic setting. These practices illustrate how digital media can mediate religious education as a process of emotional anchoring, linguistic hybridity, and familial intimacy.

Discussion

The results of this study illuminate how digital literacy and bilingual storytelling can reimagine Islamic education as a transformative, relational, and affective process for Indonesian migrant families. Children’s engagement with the Tarbiyah MAE application revealed not only their enthusiasm toward digital learning but also the emergence of moral reflection and linguistic negotiation within family interactions. These findings resonate with the argument that digital Islamic education, when mediated through narrative and emotion, allows children to experience faith not as abstract doctrine but as a living moral story embedded in their everyday digital lives (Mashudi & Hilman, 2024; Restalia & Khasanah, 2025). Through the bilingual stories presented in Tarbiyah MAE, children developed affective empathy, reflective curiosity, and moral imagination dimensions that constitute the term “digital competence in faith learning,” encompassing both technological skill and ethical discernment (Abubakari & Kalinaki, 2024).

A significant observation from this study is how the bilingual format facilitated meaning-making across languages. The children’s spontaneous code-switching and their parents’ translanguaging explanations exemplify the dialogic nature of bilingual Islamic learning. These findings correspond with previous

research emphasizing that bilingualism enhances both cognitive flexibility and emotional depth in children's moral comprehension (Hidayatulloh & Afyah, 2025; Kurniawan et al., 2024). In this study, bilingual narration in Indonesian and English allowed families to bridge linguistic hierarchies while maintaining a sense of cultural authenticity. The use of Indonesian sustained familiarity and emotional closeness, while English provided access to global vocabulary and contemporary contexts. This linguistic duality mirrors what Purnama et al. (2022) describe as translingual literacy, the ability to move fluidly across languages, identities, and values through storytelling. In this way, the Tarbiyah MAE app became a site where digital literacy intertwined with the Islamic ethic of language use that values humility, clarity, and respect. Moreover, the children's moral interpretations showed that digital storytelling facilitated embodied moral learning, an integration of emotion, cognition, and faith. When children expressed empathy toward a character's kindness or perseverance, they were not merely interpreting the plot but internalizing ethical principles through affective resonance. This aligns with (Ervina et al., 2025), who found that children's exposure to Islamic narratives improves not only moral vocabulary but also prosocial behavior. In Tarbiyah MAE, the combination of narration, visual cues, and rhythm created what Sulastri & Ismail (2025) call technology-enhanced spirituality, where digital media becomes a contemplative medium rather than a distraction. The moral insights that emerged children voluntarily sharing, praying, or helping, suggest that affective engagement can lead to behavioral transformation, fulfilling the integrative goals of Islamic education as both education and moral cultivation.

Equally important is the role of the family as a learning ecosystem. The narrative inquiry revealed that parents and children co-constructed meaning during the storytelling sessions. Parents' reflections demonstrated that digital storytelling functioned as an extension of moral modeling, where parental guidance merged with digital media to strengthen emotional ties. This finding aligns with Mariani et al. (2025), who reported that family participation enhances the moral efficacy of digital Islamic education. For migrant families, these shared storytelling moments served as rituals of remembrance, linking them emotionally to their homeland while nurturing continuity of faith. The parents' bilingual conversations with their children reflect the Islamic literacy through culture (Umar et al., 2023), where learning is sustained through lived dialogue rather than institutional instruction. Thus, in transnational families, faith learning unfolds as both an educational and affective event, reinforcing belonging across geographical and linguistic boundaries.

Unlike school-based studies that emphasize structured curriculum or teacher-mediated content, the learning observed in this study was informal, affective, and relational. The families' engagement with the Tarbiyah MAE app showed that Islamic education can thrive beyond classrooms, especially when families adopt technology as a shared reflective space. This observation extends previous works such as Afif & Dwijayanto (2021) and Subandi et al. (2025), which have examined formal digital initiatives emphasizing moderation and character formation. While these studies highlight the macro-level transformation of Islamic education, the present research reveals a micro-level transformation

occurring within domestic and diasporic spaces. Here, the process of reimagining education is situated within everyday acts of care, parents explaining, children asking, and both negotiating meaning through digital interaction. This suggests that the strength of digital Islamic education lies not only in its technological sophistication but in its capacity to foster intimacy, empathy, and reflection.

The findings also expand current theoretical discussions about transformative Islamic pedagogy. In the context of digital learning, transformation occurs when learners are emotionally and spiritually engaged in constructing meaning rather than passively consuming content. This aligns with Wajdi et al. (2025), who argue that the future of Islamic education lies in reconceptualizing pedagogy through critical reflection and technological empathy. The results of this study demonstrate that bilingual digital storytelling offers a practical pathway to such transformation. It allows children to engage critically with moral dilemmas, reflect on faith through multiple languages, and develop a sense of doing good with awareness and intention, in digital contexts. Through this process, digital literacy becomes ethical literacy, an integration of technological fluency, spiritual sensitivity, and linguistic awareness.

From a comparative perspective, the migrant family context adds a valuable dimension to the discourse on Islamic digital learning. The experiences of the participants highlight how Islamic education adapts within transnational realities characterized by mobility, multiculturalism, and hybrid identities. For children of Indonesian migrant workers in Australia, bilingual digital storytelling becomes a symbolic bridge between heritage and contemporary belonging. The parents' reflections revealed that listening to stories in Indonesian evokes nostalgia and cultural continuity, while English narration fosters a sense of participation in their host society. This dynamic reflects what Malizal, (2025) describes as digital integration of identity, where Islamic education negotiates between local values and global expression. Such findings underscore the importance of designing educational technologies that accommodate translingual, transcultural, and transnational identities, ensuring that faith learning remains inclusive and relevant.

These insights also have pedagogical implications for educators and developers of Islamic digital resources. Teachers should view digital storytelling as a form of moral dialogue that combines emotional engagement with linguistic enrichment. App designers and curriculum developers are encouraged to embed values of moderation and compassion into interactive narratives to ensure that digital Islamic learning remains grounded in ethical and aesthetic dimensions. As Mashudi & Hilman (2024) suggested, the affective and spiritual potential of digital platforms depends on intentional design that aligns form, content, and pedagogical purpose. Training programs for Islamic educators could integrate digital storytelling and bilingual pedagogy into teacher preparation curricula, enabling future educators to use technology not merely for instruction but for nurturing character and empathy.

Theoretically, the findings affirm that digital storytelling represents a synthesis of narrative theology and transformative pedagogy. It provides an avenue for students to interpret faith through stories that mirror their lived experiences, thereby bridging the gap between doctrine and practice. Islamic

education moves toward dialogical and humanistic models (Rachman, 2025; Restalia & Khasanah, 2025). In this sense, bilingual storytelling embodies a pedagogy of mercy, one that humanizes technology by grounding it in compassion and care. The family narratives analyzed in this study reveal that even within digital environments, Islamic education retains its relational and ethical essence. By engaging with stories together, migrant families transform technology into a space of remembrance and reflection.

Overall, this discussion affirms that digital literacy and bilingual storytelling can reimagine Islamic education as a transformative, affective, and inclusive practice. The experiences of the participating families demonstrate that when technology is used ethically and creatively, it becomes a medium for cultivating moral imagination, empathy, and identity formation. This study thus contributes to the growing body of research advocating for an integrative vision of Islamic education, one that harmonizes tradition and modernity, local culture and global language, digital innovation and spiritual depth. In doing so, it reinforces that the future of Islamic pedagogy lies not only in mastering technology but in rehumanizing it through stories, relationships, and the timeless pursuit of meaning.

Conclusion

This study concludes that digital literacy and bilingual storytelling have the transformative potential to reimagine Islamic education for children of Indonesian migrant workers. Through the Tarbiyah MAE application, children and parents engaged in interactive faith learning that combined emotional resonance, linguistic flexibility, and moral reflection. The narrative inquiry revealed that bilingual digital stories fostered children's curiosity, moral awareness, and empathy, while strengthening intergenerational bonds and cultural continuity within transnational families. The integration of Indonesian and English narration allowed children to experience faith as both a spiritual and linguistic journey, supporting identity formation in diaspora contexts. These results demonstrate that technology, when used intentionally and ethically, can serve as a compassionate bridge between tradition and modernity, connecting Islamic values with the lived experiences of young learners in multicultural environments.

Based on these insights, it is recommended that Islamic educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers promote the use of digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool for enhancing moral and linguistic literacy. Future digital Islamic learning resources should adopt bilingual and multimodal designs that encourage family participation and contextual learning. Collaboration between app developers, educators, and religious scholars is crucial to ensure that digital platforms remain pedagogically sound and spiritually grounded. Further research could expand this work by exploring other diasporic contexts, comparative linguistic settings, and the long-term impact of bilingual digital storytelling on faith formation and identity development. Ultimately, cultivating digitally grounded spirituality through narrative-driven learning can prepare the next

generation of Muslim learners to engage ethically, creatively, and confidently in a globalized world.

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