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Islamic Mental Well-Being in Elementary Madrasah Students in the Digital Era: A Systematic Literature Review

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The digital era has brought significant transformations in the lifestyles of children, including elementary school (MI) students who are in a critical developmental phase aged 7-12 years. This study aims to systematically review scientific literature related to Islamic mental well-being in MI students amidst the dynamics of digital technology. Using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method with a qualitative approach, this study analyzed 15 empirical articles published between 2020 and 2026 from indexed academic databases. Thematic results indicate that Islamic mental well-being in MI students is influenced by three main dimensions: (1) daily spiritual practices (prayer, prayer, and dhikr), (2) the quality of relationship with God, and (3) ecological support from the madrasah and family environment. On the other hand, excessive digital exposure has been shown to be positively correlated with increased anxiety and impaired personal-social development. This study recommends the integration of the *tazkiyatun nafs approach* and spiritual-based digital literacy in the madrasah curriculum to build students' mental resilience in the digital era.

Keywords: Islamic Mental Well-being, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Digital Era, Systematic Literature Review, Children's Spirituality

Abstrak

Era digital telah membawa transformasi signifikan dalam pola hidup anak-anak, termasuk siswa Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) yang berada pada fase perkembangan kritis usia 7-12 tahun. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara sistematis literatur ilmiah terkait kesejahteraan mental berbasis Islam (Islamic mental well-being) pada siswa MI di tengah dinamika teknologi digital. Menggunakan metode Systematic Literature Review (SLR) dengan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis 15 artikel empiris yang dipublikasikan dalam kurun waktu 2020-2026 dari basis data akademik terindeks. Hasil tematik menunjukkan bahwa kesejahteraan mental Islami pada siswa MI dipengaruhi oleh tiga dimensi utama: (1) praktik spiritual harian (salat, doa, dan dzikir), (2) kualitas hubungan dengan Allah

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(relationship with God), serta (3) dukungan ekologis dari lingkungan madrasah dan keluarga. Di sisi lain, eksposur digital berlebihan terbukti berkorelasi positif dengan peningkatan kecemasan dan gangguan perkembangan personal-sosial. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan integrasi pendekatan *tazkiyatun nafs* dan literasi digital berbasis spiritual dalam kurikulum madrasah untuk membangun ketahanan mental siswa di era digital.

Kata Kunci: Kesejahteraan Mental Islami, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Era Digital, Systematic Literature Review, Spiritualitas Anak

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The 21st century has ushered in a digital era that has transformed nearly every aspect of human life, including education and child development. In Indonesia, the penetration of digital device use among elementary school-aged children has seen a significant surge. According to data from the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture, Indonesian children's *screen time* has exceeded safe limits, exceeding 7.5 hours per day, even for children under two years of age (Pratikno, 2026). This condition is a serious concern because excessive digital exposure has the potential to disrupt children's mental health, social skills, and behavioral development.

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), as an Islamic educational institution that accommodates students aged 7–12, plays a strategic role in shaping the foundation of children's spirituality and mental well-being. At this age, children are in the *industry versus inferiority phase*, according to Erik Erikson's theory, where they begin to develop competence and self-confidence through social interactions and academic achievement (Erikson, 1963). Amidst the digital onslaught, the challenge for MI is how to maintain Islamic spiritual values while preparing students to become a mentally resilient generation.

well-being from an Islamic perspective differs substantially from Western understandings, which generally focus on the individual and hedonism. Within the Islamic framework, mental well-being (*afiyah*) is inseparable from a close relationship with God (*taqarrub*), a balance between the physical and spiritual dimensions, and life satisfaction stemming from inner peace (*sakinah*) (Rothman & Coyle, 2018). This concept is relevant to study in the context of Islamic elementary school students because childhood is a *sensitive period* for the formation of spiritual habits and religious identity. An empirical study conducted by Hammad (2024) on Muslim students in the United States showed that the practice of prayer and dua (*dua*) had a significant positive correlation with students' academic engagement and prosocial behavior. More interestingly, the findings revealed that the relationship with God *acts* as a strong mediator between religious practices and students' happiness and life satisfaction. These findings provide initial evidence that Islamic spirituality has a significant impact on children's mental well-being, albeit within a Western cultural context.

In Indonesia, research conducted by Bali and Astutik (2023) at a private Islamic elementary school in Probolinggo found that online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic had a complex psychological impact on students. The cognitive aspect showed increased technological knowledge but low understanding of the material. The affective aspect experienced emotional

instability in the form of stress, anxiety, gadget dependence, and boredom. The conative aspect showed good communication with parents but minimal socialization with peers.

Based on this background, a fundamental question arises: How can Islamic-based mental well-being be maintained and developed in MI students amidst increasingly complex digital dynamics? This question is relevant because, to date, literature specifically examining *Islamic mental well-being* in MI students in the digital era is still limited and has not been systematically synthesized.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Mental Well-being from an Islamic Perspective

Mental well-being in Islam is inseparable from the concept of *afiyah*, which means overall safety, health, and inner peace. This term refers to a state in which a person feels calm, peaceful, and protected from various forms of inner anxiety. In a hadith narrated by Ibn Majah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "*No servant prays with a prayer more beloved to Allah than the prayer for afiyah*" (Hadith Hasan).

Rothman and Coyle (2018), in their framework on Islamic psychology and psychotherapy, proposed an Islamic model of the soul consisting of four components: *qalb* (heart), *ruh* (soul), *nafs* (willing soul), and *aql* (reason). This model emphasizes that mental well-being is achieved when these four components are in balance and functioning according to their purpose. A healthy *qalb* will produce *sakinah* (tranquility), while a controlled *nafs* through the process of *tazkiyah* (purification) will prevent one from destructive behavior.

This concept is particularly relevant for children, as they are in the process of forming character and spiritual habits. A study by Holder et al. (2010) showed that children who engage in regular religious practices report higher levels of happiness compared to less engaged children. However, Holder also emphasized that children's understanding of spirituality differs from that of adults. Children tend to view God from a more positive and personal perspective, which provides a strong foundation for developing a *relationship with God* (Hammad, 2024).

2.2 Spiritual Development in Elementary School Children

Mata-McMahon (2016) in her systematic review emphasized that children's spirituality has unique characteristics that differ from those of adults and adolescents. Children aged 7–12 are in Piaget's *concrete operational phase*, where they begin to think logically but are still heavily reliant on concrete experiences. In the context of spirituality, children at this age begin to understand abstract concepts such as God, heaven, and sin through direct experience and teachings from the adults around them.

In the madrasah environment, MI students have a unique opportunity to internalize Islamic practices through daily repetition. The five daily prayers, Quran recitation, and prayer become part of a routine that is not only ritualistic but also forms the foundation of spirituality. A study by Hammad (2024) found that students who performed prayers more frequently and independently demonstrated higher levels of academic engagement and better prosocial behavior. This finding aligns with the theory of *embodied spirituality*, which states that physical religious practices (such as prayer) influence psychological well-being through mechanisms of mindfulness and emotion regulation.

2.3 The Digital Era and Its Impact on Children's Mental Health

The digital era brings various conveniences but also new challenges for child development. Research conducted by Sahimi et al. (2022) in Malaysia found that excessive smartphone use correlated with social anxiety and a reduced quality of life in medical students. Although the sample was made up of students, these findings provide initial indications that excessive digital exposure can negatively impact mental health.

More specifically, in elementary school-aged children, research in Indonesia by Setiadi et al. (2024) showed that excessive gadget use is associated with impaired psychological development and a decline in early childhood religiousness. Children who spend more than 3 hours per day using gadgets tend to exhibit higher levels of anxiety and lower social skills.

A cross-sectional study conducted in Garut, Indonesia, of elementary school students aged 6–12 years found a significant positive correlation between the duration of daily gadget use and children's anxiety levels ($r = 0.215$, $p = 0.040$). Although the correlation was weak, the findings consistently showed that the longer children used gadgets, the higher their anxiety levels (Anonymous, 2026).

A more comprehensive study by Tang et al. (2021) in their longitudinal systematic review found that excessive screen time in young people is associated with increased symptoms of depression and anxiety. Proposed mechanisms include sleep cycle disruption due to blue light exposure, cognitive overstimulation from digital content, and reduced time for physical activity and in-person social interactions.

2.4 Islamic Counseling Approach to Students' Mental Health

Suhertina (2025) conducted a systematic literature review of Islamic-based counseling approaches for student mental health. The review identified six main approaches: *tazkiyatun nafs* (*self-control*), Sufi psychotherapy, Islamic Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (ICBT), *Islamic expressive writing* , Islamic character education, and Sharia-based digital counseling. These six approaches

demonstrated effectiveness in reducing anxiety, improving emotional regulation, and building students' spiritual resilience.

However, Suhertina also identified various challenges in implementing Islamic counseling, including limited counselor competency in integrating Islamic principles, stigma against counseling, technological gaps, and a lack of evidence-based longitudinal research. These findings suggest that despite the enormous potential of the Islamic approach, its implementation still requires further development, particularly in the context of Islamic elementary schools (*madrasah ibtidaiyah*).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrative theoretical framework that combines the theory of child spiritual development (Mata-McMahon, 2016), the Islamic model of the soul (Rothman & Coyle, 2018), and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory. This framework views the mental well-being of MI students as the result of the interaction between individual factors (spiritual practices, relationship with God), microsystem factors (family, *madrasah*, peers), and macrosystem factors (digital culture, educational policies). This ecological approach is relevant because it allows researchers to comprehensively understand the complexity of the influence of digitalization on students' mental well-being.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This research employed a qualitative method with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. SLR was chosen because it allows researchers to identify, evaluate, and synthesize findings from various empirical studies in a transparent and systematic manner (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). A qualitative approach with thematic analysis was used to explore the meanings and patterns that emerged from the collected literature.

3.2 Article Selection Procedure

The article selection process follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol with the following stages:

Identification: Article searches were conducted on Google Scholar, DOAJ, ScienceDirect, PubMed, and Sinta databases using the following keywords: "Islamic mental well-being," "Muslim children mental health," "madrasah students spirituality," "digital era Islamic education," "religious coping children," and "screen time mental health elementary." The search was conducted in the period January–March 2026.

Screening: Identified articles were screened based on title and abstract. The inclusion criteria used were: (1) articles in English or Indonesian, (2)

published between 2020 and 2026, (3) focused on the mental health or spiritual well-being of Muslim students, (4) using empirical methods (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed), and (5) fully accessible (*full text*). Exclusion criteria included: (1) opinion or editorial articles, (2) articles lacking primary data, and (3) articles focusing on adult populations without relevance to elementary school-aged children.

Eligibility: Articles that passed screening were evaluated for eligibility through *full-text reading* . At this stage, 15 articles met the criteria and were included in the final analysis.

Inclusion: Selected articles were extracted for data and analyzed thematically.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data from selected articles were extracted using a data matrix that included: (1) bibliographic information, (2) research design, (3) sample and context, (4) main variables, (5) key findings, and (6) practical implications. Thematic analysis was conducted using open coding procedures, grouping codes into categories, and synthesizing categories into main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure credibility, *member checking was conducted* through repeated readings and recording analytical memos.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Characteristics of the Articles Reviewed

The selection process resulted in 15 articles meeting the inclusion criteria. The characteristics of these articles are as follows:

- By year of publication: 3 articles (2020–2021), 5 articles (2022–2023), 5 articles (2024), and 2 articles (2025–2026).
- Based on study location: 6 articles from Indonesia, 4 articles from the United States, 2 articles from Malaysia, 2 articles from Turkey/Egypt, and 1 article from a cross-country study.
- Based on research design: 6 quantitative studies, 5 qualitative studies, and 4 literature review studies.
- Based on focus: 8 articles focused on spirituality and mental health, 5 articles focused on the impact of digital/screen time, and 2 articles focused on Islamic counseling interventions.

4.2 Thematic Findings

Based on thematic analysis, three main themes were found related to *Islamic mental well-being* in MI students in the digital era:

First Theme : Daily Spiritual Practice as the Foundation of Mental Well-Being

This theme underscores the importance of daily religious practices in shaping students' mental well-being. A study by Hammad (2024) showed that

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student engagement in prayer and supplication independently correlated positively with academic engagement (*student-reported academic engagement* : $\beta = 0.15, p < 0.05$; *teacher-reported academic engagement* : $\beta = 0.18, p < 0.05$) and prosocial behavior ($\beta = 0.09, p = 0.05$). These findings confirm that religious practices are not only ritualistic but also have a psychological function in increasing focus, discipline, and social empathy.

Further, a mediation analysis in the same study revealed that a relationship with God mediated the relationship between prayer practices and happiness (*indirect effect* : $b = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.02–0.14]) and life satisfaction (*indirect effect* : $b = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.02–0.16]). This means that students who pray more frequently experience a better quality of relationship with God, which in turn increases their happiness and life satisfaction. This mechanism can be understood through the concept of *mindful prayer* (khusyuk) which facilitates emotional regulation and reduces negative rumination.

In the Indonesian context, a study by Syahri et al. (2025) that validated a mental health instrument for madrasah students in Mataram found that the instrument measuring spirituality and happiness had good construct validity (34% for student mental health). Although this study focused on instrument validation, its findings provide evidence that the spiritual dimension is an important component in measuring madrasah students' mental health.

Second Theme : Quality of Relationship with God as Key Mediator

The second theme emphasizes that the quality of one's relationship with God is a central factor in the mental well-being of MI students. Unlike religious practices, which are external, a relationship with God is internal and personal, reflecting the depth of one's spirituality.

A study by Hammad (2024) found that a relationship with God was the strongest predictor of happiness ($\beta = 0.44, p < 0.001$) and life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.44, p < 0.001$), even when controlled for other variables such as immigration status and metacognition. This finding is highly significant because it suggests that the depth of spiritual connection has a greater impact on mental well-being than the frequency of religious practice alone.

From an Islamic perspective, this finding aligns with the concept of *taqarrub* (closeness to God), which is the primary goal of every servant. Children who have a positive relationship with God tend to have a strong foundation of self-confidence because they feel loved, protected, and cared for by their Creator. This sense of *security* serves as a crucial psychological buffer amidst various developmental challenges.

A study by Karaca and Şener (2021) of Turkish mothers with children with disabilities also demonstrated the crucial role of *religious coping* through prayer,

salat, and Quran reading. Although the contexts differ, these findings confirm that Islamic spirituality serves as a source of strength and meaning in life when facing challenges.

Third Theme : The Impact of Digitalization and Challenges for Mental Well-Being

The third theme reveals the complex impact of digitalization on the mental well-being of MI students. On the one hand, digital technology opens up broader access to information and learning. On the other hand, excessive exposure has the potential to disrupt children's mental and spiritual development.

A study by Bali and Astutik (2023) at MI Probolinggo found that online learning during the pandemic led to gadget dependence among students. The affective aspect showed impaired emotional stability in the form of stress, worry, fear, and boredom. The conative aspect showed reduced socialization with peers, a crucial component of the socio-emotional development of elementary school-aged children.

A 2025 study in Indonesia by a research team from Bandung found a highly significant association between screen time duration and the risk of suboptimal personal-social development ($p < 0.001$). Children with screen time of ≥ 120 minutes per day had a 2.93 times higher risk of experiencing suboptimal personal-social development compared to children with lower screen time (AOR = 2.93; 95% CI: 1.39–6.19). This finding is a serious warning considering that children in preschool and elementary school are in a critical phase of developing social skills.

A 2026 study in Garut, Indonesia, of elementary school students aged 6–12 years found a positive correlation between the duration of gadget use and anxiety levels ($r = 0.215$; $p = 0.040$). Although the correlation was weak, this finding is consistent with international literature showing that excessive screen time is associated with increased symptoms of anxiety and depression in children.

More broadly, a study by Abdullah et al. (2022) in Malaysia showed that sociodemographic factors influence mobile device use among young children, with implications for their psychological development. A study by Ng and Ng (2022) in a systematic review of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's mental health also confirmed that increased screen use during the pandemic contributed to increased mental health problems.

4.3 Synthesis and Discussion

The three themes identified in this review are interrelated and form a framework for a holistic understanding of *Islamic mental well-being* among MI students in the digital age. Daily spiritual practices serve as a foundation for

building a quality relationship with God, which in turn serves as a source of mental resilience. However, uncontrolled digitalization can disrupt both dimensions by reducing the time and quality of spiritual interactions, as well as impairing children's social-emotional development.

From Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory perspective, MI students are at the intersection of the microsystem (madrasah and family) and the ecosystem (digital culture). When the microsystem fails to provide boundaries and models healthy behaviors regarding technology use, the digital ecosystem can dominate a child's development. Therefore, the role of teachers and parents is crucial in mediating the influence of digitalization.

The concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) in Islam is relevant as a framework for intervention. The *tazkiyatun nafs process* involves controlling desires, developing character, and strengthening one's relationship with God. In the context of the digital era, *tazkiyatun nafs* can be applied through the development of spiritually based digital literacy, where students are taught to use technology wisely without losing focus on Islamic values.

A study by Suhertina (2025) showed that Islamic counseling approaches, including ICBT and *Islamic expressive writing*, have proven effective in improving students' mental well-being. However, implementation at the elementary school level still faces challenges due to limited resources and teacher competency.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a systematic literature review, it can be concluded that:

1. Islamic mental well-being in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students is a multidimensional construct that includes daily spiritual practices, the quality of relationships with Allah, and ecological support from the madrasah and family environment.
2. The practice of prayer, supplication, and dhikr has a significant positive impact on students' academic engagement, prosocial behavior, and happiness, with the quality of their relationship with Allah acting as a key mediator.
3. Digitalization brings serious challenges to the mental well-being of MI students, where excessive digital exposure is correlated with increased anxiety, impaired personal-social development, and gadget dependence.
4. the *tazkiyatun nafs* approach and spiritual-based digital literacy in the madrasa curriculum is a potential strategy for building students' mental resilience in the digital era.

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