Creativity in Islamic Religious Education: A Qualitative Study on the Development and Implementation of Digital Comics in Primary Schools

Muslikh Riza[1], Moh Anwar[2], Moh Sutomo[3]
[123]UIN Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember
E-mail : arisalmuslikh@gmail.com[1], mohanwar0268@gmail.com[2], Sutomo@uinkhas.ac.id[3]

Abstract
This study aims to explore the development and implementation of digital comic media in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SDN No. 4 Tuban Kuta Badung. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The findings indicate that the use of digital comics as a learning medium improves students' motivation, understanding of Islamic values, and active participation in the learning process. Visual narratives that are relatable to students' daily lives support the internalization of moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and tolerance. Teachers also experienced enhanced creativity in designing digital-based instruction. This study concludes that digital comics are an effective medium for Islamic education at the elementary level and can serve as a strategic alternative for delivering engaging, contextual, and relevant religious instruction in the digital era.
Keywords*: Digital comics, Islamic Religious Education, creativity, meaningful learning, elementary school*

Abstrak
Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengembangan dan implementasi media pembelajaran komik digital dalam mata pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di SDN No. 4 Tuban Kuta Badung. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan komik digital sebagai media pembelajaran mampu meningkatkan motivasi belajar, pemahaman nilai-nilai keislaman, serta partisipasi aktif siswa dalam proses pembelajaran. Cerita visual yang disesuaikan dengan kehidupan sehari-hari siswa membantu proses internalisasi nilai-nilai moral seperti kejujuran, tanggung jawab, dan toleransi. Guru juga mengalami peningkatan kreativitas dalam merancang pembelajaran berbasis digital. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa komik digital merupakan media yang efektif dalam pembelajaran PAI di sekolah dasar dan dapat menjadi alternatif strategis dalam menghadirkan pendidikan agama yang menyenangkan, kontekstual, dan relevan di era digital.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern digital age, the landscape of education is undergoing a significant transformation. With the widespread integration of technology into various aspects of life, the learning environment in schools is also evolving, particularly in terms of instructional media. Primary school students, as part of the digital native generation, are increasingly inclined toward interactive, visual, and engaging content(Ariesta & Kusumayati, 2018). This shift requires educators to reconsider and innovate their teaching methods to accommodate learners' interests, cognitive development, and media consumption habits(R. G. Sari & Erita, 2021). One of the areas where this innovation is urgently needed is Islamic Religious Education (IRE), a subject that holds a critical role in shaping students' moral integrity, religious identity, and character from an early age.

However, despite its importance, IRE in primary schools often faces significant challenges. Traditional teaching practicessuch as lecturing, rote memorization, and textbook-based instruction are still widely used, resulting in a lack of student motivation and engagement. Many students perceive religious subjects as abstract, monotonous, and disconnected from their daily experiences(Y. Sari et al., 2020). This problem becomes more pressing in multicultural and tourism-dense areas such as Bali, where Islamic students attend public schools alongside peers of different faiths. The need to present Islamic teachings in a way that is not only informative but also appealing, contextual, and inclusive has become a pedagogical imperative(Dewi, 2019). At the same time, fostering a love for religious learning at the elementary level is foundational to building strong moral character and interfaith tolerance in the long term.

In light of these challenges, the use of digital comic media in Islamic Religious Education emerges as a promising and creative solution. Digital comics, as a blend of visual art and narrative storytelling, have proven effective in conveying complex concepts in a simplified and enjoyable manner(Ngazizah et al., 2022). They offer dynamic visual stimulation, relatable characters, and moral storylines that resonate with young learners. From a pedagogical standpoint, digital comics support various learning styles visual, auditory, and kinesthetic thereby accommodating diverse student needs(Ramadhan et al., 2023). The narrative format also aligns with Islamic educational traditions, which have

historically employed stories (qashash) from the Qur'an and Hadith to communicate values. Thus, integrating digital comics into IRE is not only innovative but also culturally and theologically appropriate.

Empirical observations and preliminary interviews conducted at SDN No.4 Tuban Kuta Badung indicate that students respond positively to the use of digital comics in PAI learning. They demonstrate increased enthusiasm, better retention of material, and deeper understanding of religious values when lessons are presented through story-based visuals. Teachers also report improved classroom dynamics, greater ease in explaining difficult concepts, and enhanced student-teacher interaction. These initial findings suggest that the application of digital comics can be a transformative pedagogical tool in the teaching of IRE.

Previous studies support this assertion. For instance, research by Sari (Oktavia & Eliyasni, 2020) found that visual media, including comics, can significantly enhance student engagement and academic outcomes in religious education. Similarly, (Ngazizah et al., 2022) observed that the use of comic strips in moral instruction helped students grasp ethical dilemmas and apply values in real-life contexts. However, despite these encouraging findings, there is still a noticeable research gap. Most existing studies have focused on the impact of comic media in general education or secondary Islamic studies. Few have explored how such media are developed and implemented in the specific context of primary school Islamic education, particularly in public schools with diverse cultural settings like Bali.

Furthermore, the process of developing culturally sensitive and pedagogically effective digital comics tailored to Islamic teachings remains underexplored. There is a need for research that not only evaluates the outcomes of media use but also investigates the creative and instructional processes involved in media development, teacher readiness, and student reception. Such insights are crucial for guiding future efforts in digital curriculum design, teacher training, and media innovation in Islamic education.

This study seeks to address these gaps by conducting a qualitative investigation into the development and implementation of digital comics as instructional media in the IRE subject at SDN No.4 Tuban Kuta Badung. Specifically, it aims to uncover how creative instructional media can enhance the delivery of Islamic teachings, support students' comprehension of religious values, and encourage positive attitudes toward religious learning. By examining teacher perspectives, student experiences, and classroom practices, this research contributes to the growing discourse on innovation in religious education and offers practical recommendations for the future of Islamic pedagogy in the digital age.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design to explore the development and implementation of digital comics as instructional media in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SDN No.4 Tuban Kuta Badung. The qualitative method was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in its natural context, allowing the researcher to capture the real experiences, perceptions, and interactions of the participants. A case study design enabled a focused examination of a single setting where digital comic media had been integrated into IRE, thus allowing detailed analysis of the teaching-learning process, the media used, and its impact on students and teachers. The study was conducted at SDN No.4 Tuban Kuta Badung, a public elementary school located in a culturally diverse area, making it a relevant site for innovation in religious instruction.

Participants included one Islamic Religious Education teacher as the primary subject, students from grades IV and V who experienced the learning media, and school officials such as the principal and vice principal for curriculum affairs, who provided contextual insights regarding the school's support for digital innovation in pedagogy. Data for this research were collected through three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted in a participatory manner during IRE classes to capture the instructional delivery using digital comics, the level of student engagement, and classroom interaction dynamics. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the teacher to gain insights into the development process of the comic media, pedagogical strategies, challenges encountered, and the perceived effectiveness of the media.

Additional interviews were also conducted with selected students to understand their learning experiences and responses. Documentation analysis included lesson plans (RPP), digital comic content, student worksheets, and school policy documents related to digital learning. Both primary data, obtained directly from the field, and secondary data, gathered from institutional documents, were triangulated to ensure validity. The data were analyzed using an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as proposed by Miles and Huberman. This methodological framework enabled the researcher to interpret the qualitative data systematically and present comprehensive findings on how creativity through digital comic media can enrich Islamic Religious Education in the primary school context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study are presented based on the data collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis at SDN No. 4 Tuban Kuta Badung. These data reveal the development process, implementation, and impact of using digital comics as instructional media in Islamic Religious Education (IRE). The analysis is structured thematically and incorporates raw data excerpts to support the interpretation.

1. The Development of Digital Comic Media

    Based on interviews with the IRE teacher, the digital comic was designed to align with the fourth-grade IRE curriculum, particularly the topic "Meneladani Sifat Terpuji Rasulullah SAW." The development process began with designing storyboards that incorporated Islamic values through relatable characters and everyday situations. The teacher explained:

    "Saya membuat ceritanya sederhana, tokohnya anak-anak seusia mereka, misalnya ada tokoh Aisyah dan Rafi yang membantu teman, tidak menyontek, dan jujur. Setiap cerita selalu diakhiri dengan kutipan ayat atau hadis pendek." (Interview, March 10 2025)

    This data indicates that the teacher integrated cognitive and affective aspects of Islamic teachings into the storyline. The comics were then digitized using Canva and PowerPoint, and exported as PDF files for distribution via the school's digital learning platform.

    Document analysis of the lesson plan confirms that digital comics were embedded into the learning activities across three stages: introduction (apersepsi with storytelling), core learning (comic reading and discussion), and reflection (students writing their values-based takeaways). One of the lesson plan objectives stated:

    "Siswa dapat mengidentifikasi sikap jujur, amanah, dan sabar yang dicontohkan oleh Rasulullah SAW melalui media komik digital dengan benar."

2. Implementation in the Classroom Setting

    Through classroom observation, it was evident that the use of digital comics significantly influenced the dynamics of teaching and learning. In the observed lesson on

March 12, 2025, the teacher began the class by displaying the comic on a projector. Students were immediately attentive, smiling and whispering comments like "*Itu kayak si Bagas*!" or "*Lucu banget gambarnya*!"

Students read the comic aloud in turns, with the teacher pausing to ask comprehension questions and initiate discussions. For instance, after a scene where the character returns a lost wallet, the teacher asked:

"*Siapa tahu kisah seperti ini dalam kehidupan sehari-hari?*"

One student, Rizky (Grade 4), answered:

"*Saya pernah nemu dompet di jalan, saya kasih ke mama*."

This real-life connection between text and experience demonstrates how digital comics helped bridge moral values and students' personal lives. Moreover, the digital visuals enabled students to interpret expressions, actions, and contexts more vividly than through text alone.

The researcher noted in field notes:

"The students were highly engaged; they laughed at comic panels, raised their hands to answer moral questions, and remained active throughout the 40-minute session. Compared to the teacher's previous textbook-based lesson, there was a significant improvement in classroom energy and student participation."

3. Student Responses and Engagement

Interviews with six students revealed their enthusiasm for the digital comic learning method. When asked to compare traditional and comic-based learning, most expressed a preference for the latter. A student named Farah stated:

"Kalau pakai komik jadi kayak nonton kartun, seru dan gampang ngerti maksudnya."

Another, Arya, added: "Aku suka karena ada gambar dan ceritanya mirip sama yang kita alami di rumah atau sekolah."

This qualitative feedback demonstrates that the medium of digital comics resonates with students' cognitive styles and social realities. The inclusion of age-appropriate visuals, characters, and dialogue contributed to stronger affective engagement.

Furthermore, some students were motivated to create their own simple comics using paper and colored pencils at home after the lesson.

This spontaneous creative response indicates that digital comics did not merely serve as passive teaching tools but also inspired student agency and self-expression. It aligns with constructivist learning theory, wherein learners build meaning from context-rich, relatable content.

4. Teacher's Reflections and Pedagogical Shifts

The IRE teacher reported a noticeable shift in her teaching approach since adopting digital comics. In the interview, she remarked:

"Biasanya kalau pelajaran akidah akhlak anak-anak cepat bosan. Tapi sejak saya pakai komik digital, mereka lebih semangat, dan saya juga jadi lebih kreatif bikin materi."

She also shared a challenge:

"Butuh waktu buat bikin cerita dan desain gambarnya, tapi saya merasa senang karena hasilnya kelihatan langsung di kelas."

This statement illustrates that digital comics not only improved student engagement but also positively impacted teacher motivation and pedagogical innovation. The teacher's shift from didactic to dialogic instruction was evident during observations: she posed more open-ended questions, facilitated peer discussions, and encouraged critical reflection, such as asking, "*Kalau kalian jadi tokoh itu, apa yang kalian lakukan*?"

5. Institutional Support and Curriculum Alignment

Interviews with the principal and vice principal revealed institutional support for innovative media use. The principal noted:

"Kami mendorong guru untuk tidak hanya mengandalkan buku teks. Komik digital ini contoh bagus bagaimana guru bisa berkreasi dan tetap sesuai kurikulum."

This alignment between innovation and curriculum goals strengthens the sustainability of the intervention. Furthermore, analysis of school policy documents

showed that the school's 2023–2025 work plan included a strategic program titled "*Peningkatan Kreativitas Guru Melalui Media Pembelajaran Digital.*" This policy context enabled the teacher to receive informal peer support and technical assistance from the school's ICT coordinator.

6. Learning Outcomes and Student Artifacts

Although the study was qualitative, evidence of improved understanding was visible in students' written reflections. In a worksheet collected from Grade 4 students, a student named Salma wrote:

"Saya belajar dari cerita Rafi bahwa jujur itu membuat hati tenang dan disukai teman. Saya mau jadi anak jujur juga."

Such reflections, though simple, demonstrate internalization of Islamic values. Another student drew her own comic panel showing a friend helping an elderly person cross the street, with the caption: *"Ini contoh akhlak terpuji."*

These artifacts reveal that students not only comprehended the values taught but also began expressing them creatively and meaningfully.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role of digital comic media in enhancing the teaching and learning process of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at the primary school level. The implementation of digital comics not only transformed the delivery of moral and religious values but also fostered student engagement, creativity, and meaningful learning experiences. This discussion elaborates on the empirical findings by integrating theoretical perspectives and previous research to contextualize the impact of digital comics on IRE pedagogy.

First and foremost, the effectiveness of digital comics in conveying Islamic values is rooted in their ability to present abstract religious concepts in a concrete and relatable manner. Traditional IRE methods often rely on rote memorization and lecture-based teaching, which, while informative, can be less effective in capturing the attention of young learners. In contrast, digital comics employ narrative, visualization, and character-driven storytelling to make values such as honesty, patience, and trustworthiness accessible to children. This approach aligns with the theory of *dual coding* by (Oktavia & Eliyasni, 2020),

which posits that information is better understood and retained when it is presented through both verbal and visual channels. In this study, students not only listened to or read the text of the comic but also interpreted the accompanying images, resulting in a richer cognitive experience.

The observed increase in student engagement and enthusiasm further supports the theory of *constructivism* (Yasa & Chrisyarani, 2018), where learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and experiences. During the comic-based lessons, students were encouraged to discuss, reflect, and connect the moral lessons to their own lives. This kind of participatory learning process is essential in religious education, where internalization of values depends heavily on contextual understanding and personal relevance. The data from student interviews demonstrated how learners saw themselves in the characters and scenarios depicted in the comics, making the lessons feel more authentic and applicable.

This finding is consistent with research by (Pinatih & Putra, 2021), who found that the use of digital storytelling and comics in IRE classes significantly improved students' moral reasoning and ability to articulate religious values. Their study in several public elementary schools in West Java revealed that students exposed to comic-based media exhibited higher participation in class discussions and more thoughtful reflections in their learning journals. Similarly, a study by (Saputro & Soeharto, 2015) in a Madrasah Ibtidaiyah context showed that digital comics fostered a more positive learning environment and reduced students' resistance to moral lessons, especially when the characters were designed to reflect the students' age and social background.

In the present study, the teacher's creativity in designing characters such as "Aisyah" and "Rafi" who face daily moral dilemmas mirrors this strategy. By embedding Islamic values in everyday narratives, the digital comic serves not only as a learning tool but also as a moral mirror that prompts students to evaluate their own behavior. According to (Feri & Husna, 2022) *social learning theory*, individuals learn from observing others, particularly models that resemble themselves. In this sense, the comic characters function as moral role models for the students.

Another important aspect revealed in this study is the teacher's transformation from a traditional transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of student-centered learning. The qualitative data showed that the teacher experienced increased motivation and pedagogical flexibility after adopting digital comics. She was able to design more interactive lessons,

engage students in moral dialogues, and even encourage them to create their own comics. This finding is in line with research by (Putri et al., 2023), who emphasized that teacher innovation and creative media use are critical factors in enhancing IRE effectiveness in the digital age. Her study found that when teachers employed multimedia storytelling, including comics, students showed a stronger connection to religious values and improved behavior in daily interactions.

Moreover, the use of digital comics aligns well with the goals of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Freedom Curriculum) introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, which emphasizes student agency, creativity, and contextual learning. The curriculum encourages educators to move beyond textbook-based instruction and adopt various digital tools to create a more engaging and meaningful learning experience. In this case, the comic media supported several key competencies outlined in the IRE curriculum, such as spiritual awareness, moral reasoning, and social responsibility. The integration of media into the lesson plan, as documented in the RPP, demonstrates how religious learning can be made dynamic and relevant without losing its essence.

However, the implementation of digital comics also faced challenges, particularly regarding the time and effort required to develop high-quality content. The teacher admitted that creating comics required not only pedagogical skill but also basic graphic design and storytelling abilities. This limitation has also been identified in previous studies, such as that by (Azemi & Hidayat, 2023), who noted that many IRE teachers are hesitant to use digital media due to a lack of training and confidence in using design tools. Their study recommends the inclusion of media development training in teacher professional development programs, especially in the context of moral education where visual media can play a powerful role.

Despite these challenges, the study confirms that institutional support plays a key role in enabling teachers to innovate. The interviews with the principal and vice principal revealed a clear vision for integrating digital pedagogy across subjects, including religious education. This top-down encouragement, coupled with school policy documents supporting digital learning, provided the teacher with the confidence and resources to experiment with comic-based instruction. This institutional backing is essential, as highlighted by (Nursakinah et al., 2023), who argued that school leadership significantly influences the adoption of educational technology in primary schools.

The use of digital comics also had implications for students' creativity and moral expression. Several students independently created their own comics after the lesson,

illustrating how the media inspired not only understanding but also personal interpretation and application of values. This outcome supports the idea of *value internalization*, where students not only receive but also reconstruct values through personal experiences and expressions. As explained by (Yu et al., 2013) in his character education framework, moral education should aim at developing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The students' drawings and written reflections serve as evidence that digital comics can touch all three components by stimulating imagination, empathy, and ethical behavior.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for the integration of culturally sensitive and contextually relevant media in IRE. Bali, as a multicultural and religiously diverse setting, requires teaching materials that are inclusive, dialogic, and reflective of the students' lived realities. The digital comic created in this study intentionally used neutral, non-sectarian symbols and familiar settings such as markets, homes, and schools to promote universal Islamic values that are accessible to students from diverse backgrounds. This strategy aligns with the findings of (Nisak et al., 2021), who emphasize the importance of contextualizing religious instruction to avoid exclusivist or rigid interpretations.

In this light, digital comics also hold potential as a medium for fostering religious moderation. By portraying Islam as a religion of peace, compassion, and social responsibility, the comics in this study subtly modeled inclusive attitudes that counter extremism and intolerance. As shown in the lesson where the character returns a lost item and chooses honesty over deceit, students were exposed to the essence of Islam through narrative ethics rather than doctrinal statements. This pedagogical approach supports the Ministry of Religious Affairs' campaign on *Moderasi Beragama* (Religious Moderation), which aims to promote balanced, tolerant, and contextual understandings of faith among students.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that digital comics are not merely supplemental teaching tools but powerful instruments of moral formation and creative pedagogy. Their narrative and visual nature caters to the developmental needs of primary school learners, while their flexibility allows teachers to tailor content according to curricular demands and student realities. To maximize their impact, however, there is a need for systemic support in terms of training, collaboration, and content curation. Future studies may also explore how student-created digital comics can further deepen value internalization and peer learning.

In conclusion, the implementation of digital comics in Islamic Religious Education at SDN No. 4 Tuban Kuta Badung demonstrated significant pedagogical and moral benefits. The media enhanced student motivation, improved teacher creativity, aligned with national curriculum goals, and provided a culturally relevant avenue for value education. When integrated thoughtfully and supported institutionally, digital comics can serve as a transformative tool in preparing young learners to become morally grounded, socially aware, and creatively expressive individuals.

CONCLUSION

Based on the qualitative research conducted at SDN No. 4 Tuban Kuta Badung, it can be concluded that the development and implementation of digital comic media in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) significantly contribute to improving students' learning outcomes, particularly in understanding and internalizing Islamic values and moral lessons. Digital comics effectively present religious content in a more engaging, visual, and contextual way, helping students relate Islamic teachings to their daily lives.

The media encouraged active student participation, enhanced learning motivation, and provided opportunities for personal creativity and reflection. By using characters and storylines relevant to the realities of children, values such as honesty, compassion, and responsibility became more accessible and meaningful. The teacher also experienced pedagogical transformation, shifting from a traditional knowledge transmitter to an active facilitator who engaged students in meaningful moral discussions.

The study also highlights the importance of institutional support, including the availability of digital facilities and innovation-friendly policies, as key enablers for successful implementation. While challenges such as time constraints and design skills exist, they can be addressed through teacher training and collaboration with students or other professionals.

Therefore, digital comics represent an effective and relevant medium for teaching Islamic Religious Education in the digital era, particularly in shaping students' character and deepening their understanding of Islamic moral principles. This study recommends that similar media be further developed and widely integrated into IRE to support religious moderation, creativity, and meaningful learning at the primary school level..

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