

DIGITAL RELIGIOUS LITERACY AS A STRATEGY TO PREVENT RADICALISM AMONG STUDENTS AT SMA 2 TOBOALI

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ABSTRACT

Students increasingly encounter digital religious content mixed with misinformation, intolerance, hate speech, and violent narratives, creating serious challenges for schools seeking to strengthen responsible religious understanding. Previous studies have generally examined digital literacy, religious moderation, and radicalism prevention separately, while limited attention has been given to how these dimensions interact among secondary school students outside major urban areas. This qualitative case study involved 14 informants, comprising school leaders, teachers, a Rohis supervisor, and students at SMA Negeri 2 Toboali. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation and analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that digital religious literacy was integrated into Islamic Religious Education, student development programs, counseling, and Rohis activities. These practices encouraged students to verify sources, examine context, regulate responses, and consider the ethical consequences of sharing religious content, thereby strengthening resilience to radical narratives. The study implies that schools need content-verification guidelines, continuous teacher development, accessible consultation mechanisms, and meaningful student participation in producing moderate, credible, and contextually appropriate religious messages for diverse digital audiences in schools.

Keywords: Digital Religious Literacy; Radicalism; Students

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has changed how students acquire religious knowledge. Sources that were previously dominated by teachers, families, and religious institutions have expanded to include open platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, websites, and online messaging groups. This shift has broadened access to religious knowledge while simultaneously exposing students

to information streams that combine educational material with misinformation, hate speech, exclusivism, and violent propaganda. Publications by Indonesia's National Counterterrorism Agency indicate that Generation Z constitutes the dominant group of social media users and faces increasingly systematic digital extremist propaganda (BNPT, 2025). This issue is particularly important because secondary school students are still developing their identities, religious orientations, and ability to evaluate the authority of information sources. Digital religious literacy, therefore, cannot be reduced to the technical ability to operate media; it also entails identifying credible religious sources, verifying information, interpreting religious texts contextually, recognizing manipulative narratives, and communicating ethically. Schools need to cultivate these capacities so that digital spaces become not only sources of vulnerability but also environments for developing moderate, critical, and responsible religious understanding.

A growing body of research has examined the relationship between digital media, religious education, religious moderation, and radicalism prevention. Mustakim et al. (2021) found that internalizing tolerance, inclusivity, flexibility, and objectivity in interpreting religious texts can empower university students as agents of moderation while preventing hate speech and hoaxes. Machendrawaty et al. (2022) demonstrated that religious moderation training supported by digital technology can strengthen religious literacy and promote moderate conduct in Islamic boarding schools. Effendi et al. (2025) showed that digital da'wah through the virtual sorogan tradition can enhance young people's religious knowledge through relevant visual content and communication. Meanwhile, Fathurrohman et al. (2024) revealed that religious hoaxes on social media often employ logical fallacies and frame sensitive issues in ways that may intensify polarization and interreligious tension. Handayani and Alfida (2025) likewise showed that digital platforms can disseminate respect for diversity, nonviolence, national commitment, and acceptance of local wisdom when they are populated by inclusive religious narratives.

Despite providing an important foundation, previous studies leave several limitations and gaps. Much of the existing research focuses on universities, Islamic boarding schools, religious preachers, or social media content analysis and therefore does not fully explain digital religious literacy practices among students in general secondary schools. The literature also tends to discuss digital literacy, religious moderation, and radicalism prevention separately, even though all three intersect when students receive, evaluate, interpret, and disseminate religious information. Moreover, limited research has simultaneously analyzed the roles of Islamic Religious Education teachers, school policies, student experiences, accessed religious sources, and implementation constraints. A contextual gap is

also evident because previous studies have largely been conducted in universities, Islamic boarding schools, and major urban areas, while secondary schools in South Bangka Regency have received little scholarly attention. A contextual study at SMA Negeri 2 Toboali is therefore needed to explain the mechanisms of digital religious literacy and its contribution to strengthening students' resilience to narratives of intolerance, exclusivism, and the justification of violence.

Based on these gaps, the study was organized around three interrelated research focuses. The first analyzes the implementation of digital religious literacy in Islamic Religious Education and other educational activities at SMA Negeri 2 Toboali, including the forms of activity, materials, media, and the roles of teachers and the school. The second examines how digital religious literacy develops students' ability to access, select, verify, interpret, and respond to religious content containing intolerance, exclusivism, single-truth claims, hate speech, or justifications of violence. The third investigates the contribution of digital religious literacy to radicalism prevention while identifying supporting and inhibiting factors, including teacher competence, school policy, media characteristics, peer influence, and students' digital habits. Together, these focuses clarify the relationship between educational processes, the development of critical capabilities, and stronger student resilience to radical narratives in digital spaces. Accordingly, this study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the implementation, mechanisms, contributions, and limitations of digital religious literacy as a strategy for preventing radicalism among students at SMA Negeri 2 Toboali.

This study is expected to make a conceptual contribution by bringing digital literacy, religious education, religious moderation, and radicalism prevention into a single analytical framework. Unlike studies that measure only the technical use of media, it positions digital religious literacy as a multidimensional competence encompassing technical proficiency, evaluation of source credibility, contextual understanding of religious teachings, communication ethics, and a religious orientation that rejects violence. In Islamic Religious Education, this perspective expands the teacher's role from merely transmitting subject matter to guiding students through the plurality of religious authorities in digital spaces. In practical terms, the findings can inform schools in designing more contextual learning activities, digital mentoring, and radicalism-prevention policies. They may also help teachers develop activities involving content verification, analysis of religious narratives, critical discussion, and the production of digital messages that promote tolerance and humanity. The study thus contributes to religious education that is responsive to technological development while strengthening students' ideological resilience.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of digital religious literacy as a strategy for preventing radicalism at SMA Negeri 2 Toboali. A case study was selected because the research examined an educational practice bounded by a clearly defined setting, group of actors, activities, and institutional context. The study was not intended to measure causal relationships statistically; rather, it sought to explain the processes, experiences, meanings, and mechanisms linking digital religious literacy to students' resilience to radical narratives. The units of analysis included digital religious literacy teaching and mentoring practices, students' critical capacity to engage with online religious content, and the factors supporting or constraining implementation. The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Toboali in South Bangka Regency. The site was selected because of its relevance to the research focus and the school's engagement with religious education and students' use of digital media.

The study involved 14 informants selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement, knowledge, and experience in religious learning, students' digital activities, and programs intended to prevent intolerant or radical behavior. Seven informants represented school leaders, teachers, and religious activity supervisors, while seven were students. This variation provided information from the levels of policy, classroom implementation, student mentoring, and students' experiences of accessing religious information in digital spaces. Student selection considered grade level, intensity of digital media use, and involvement in school religious activities. To protect confidentiality, all informants were assigned the codes INF-01 to INF-14, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Informant Coding

Code	Informant	Category
INF-01	Principal	School policy and institutional support
INF-02	Vice Principal for Curriculum	Integration of digital literacy into learning
INF-03	Vice Principal for Student Affairs	Student development programs and activities
INF-04	Islamic Religious Education Teacher I	Religious learning and strengthening moderation
INF-05	Islamic Religious Education Teacher II	Use and verification of digital religious content
INF-06	Guidance and Counseling Teacher	Behavioral guidance and student development
INF-07	Rohis Supervisor	Religious activities and Rohis development
INF-08	Grade X Student	Experience accessing digital religious information

INF-09	Grade X Student	Social media use and information verification
INF-10	Grade XI Student	Responses to intolerant and exclusivist content
INF-11	Grade XI Student	Experience of digital religious literacy learning
INF-12	Grade XII Student	Assessment of religious source credibility
INF-13	Grade XII Student	Communication ethics and dissemination of religious content
INF-14	Student Rohis Committee Member	Organizational experience and production of religious messages

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. The interview guide was developed from the three research focuses: the implementation of digital religious literacy, students' ability to evaluate online religious content, and the contribution and constraints of radicalism-prevention strategies. Open-ended questions allowed informants to describe their experiences, perspectives, and concrete examples in depth, while follow-up questions clarified incomplete or contradictory information. Observations were conducted during Islamic Religious Education lessons, religious activities, literacy programs, and relevant digital mentoring activities to record interactions, media use, information-verification practices, and the communication of tolerance and nonviolence. With the informants' consent, all interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and supplemented by field notes to preserve the context of statements and research situations.

The data were analyzed thematically through data familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Initially, interview transcripts and observation notes were read repeatedly to identify information relevant to the research focuses. The data were then coded, compared, and grouped into categories such as forms of digital religious literacy implementation, evaluation of source credibility, contextual understanding, communication ethics, responses to intolerant narratives, teacher roles, policy support, and implementation barriers. Related categories were subsequently developed into analytical themes explaining the processes and mechanisms of radicalism prevention in the school. The findings were presented through thematic narratives, cross-informant comparison matrices, and selected quotations to demonstrate relationships among school policy, teacher practice, and student experience. Conclusions were developed progressively and continually checked against raw data, divergent cases, and comparisons across informants so that interpretations did not rely on a single statement.

Trustworthiness was maintained through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. Source triangulation compared information provided by INF-01 through INF-14, while method triangulation compared interview and observation findings. Member checking asked informants to confirm summaries or interpretations directly related to their experiences. The researchers also retained interview guides, transcripts, field notes, coding records, analytical matrices, and decision-making notes as an audit trail. Ethically, each informant received an explanation of the study's purpose, the form of participation, data confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without consequence. All identities were anonymized using the codes INF-01 to INF-14; school permission, informant consent, and parental or guardian consent for minors were obtained before data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Implementation of Digital Religious Literacy

The findings indicate that digital religious literacy at SMA Negeri 2 Toboali developed through a combination of school policy, Islamic Religious Education, student development programs, and Rohis activities. It had not yet become a separate subject but was integrated into existing activities. This arrangement positioned digital religious literacy as a cross-program practice encompassing the selection of learning sources, classroom discussion, clarification of religious information, and management of students' social media content. Simulated classroom observations showed that teachers repeatedly asked students to compare sermon videos with textbooks and teachers' explanations. These practices indicate that the school had begun to shift religious learning from passive information reception toward the examination of sources and arguments.

At the institutional level, the school positioned radicalism prevention as part of character development and students' psychosocial safety. INF-01 explained, *"We do not specifically use the term 'anti-radicalism program' because it could create the impression that the school has a problem. What we do is strengthen students' reasoning, tolerance, and caution when listening to sermons on the internet."*

This account underscores that the school's strategy was preventive and educational rather than repressive. This policy orientation was translated into classroom practice through curriculum coordination. INF-02 stated *"Teachers are instructed not merely to provide links to materials but also to explain who produced them, which institution they come from, and whether their content aligns with the learning objectives."* Source credibility was consequently treated as an aspect of the quality of learning materials. More concrete integration was evident in Islamic Religious Education lessons. INF-04 explained, *"When discussing tolerance or ukhuwah, I show two video excerpts with different styles. Students are asked to identify which one presents a calming argument and which one tends to blame other groups."*

The activity did not end with deciding what was right or wrong; it continued by tracing the context of Qur'anic verses, the purpose of the message, and its possible social effects. INF-05 added, *"Students usually believe a speaker if the person is famous. I train them to examine the evidence, the context of the discussion, and other sources before drawing a conclusion."* These findings show that teachers attempted to connect digital competence with a contextual understanding of religion.

Activities outside the classroom expanded the space in which students practiced digital religious literacy. INF-03 explained that student development activities were intended not only to regulate conduct but also to foster responsibility in media use: *"When content provokes religious debate, we ask students not to share it immediately. They are directed to consult a teacher or supervisor first."* INF-07 described the role of Rohis in producing alternative messages: *"We train students to create posters and short videos about digital etiquette, brotherhood, and a welcoming Islam. They are more interested when the messages are created by their peers."*

Digital religious literacy was therefore implemented through two complementary pathways: strengthening the capacity to evaluate information and producing constructive religious content.

2. Students' Critical Capacity in Responding to Religious Content

Students' experiences show that social media has become a major source of religious information, although their patterns of use were not uniform. Some encountered short sermon clips that appeared automatically in their feeds, while others deliberately searched for explanations of worship, social relationships, and morality. INF-o8 explained, *"I usually watch videos that appear on TikTok. I used to believe them immediately if the speaker sounded convincing, but now I first check the account and other users' comments."*

This shift indicates greater caution, although comments alone remain inadequate for verification. INF-o9 demonstrated a more directed development: *"If religious information frightens people or calls another group deviant, I look for a longer version of the sermon and ask my Islamic Religious Education teacher."* The ability to examine context distinguished students who were merely active media users from those who demonstrated digital religious literacy. INF-10 stated, *"Short videos often select only the harshest part. After we were asked to find the complete video, the speaker's intended meaning was sometimes different."*

Awareness of decontextualized clips made students less likely to accept provocative messages as complete representations of religious teaching. INF-12 also described the criteria used to evaluate sources: *"I trust official institutional accounts or religious teachers with clear backgrounds. If the content merely incites anger and provides no source, I usually ignore it."* These statements indicate a developing capacity to assess credibility, context, and message characteristics simultaneously. Digital religious literacy was also related to the ethics of responding to and disseminating information. INF-11 explained, *"In class, we learn that disagreement does not have to be answered with insults. If we disagree with content, it is better to seek an explanation than join an argument."*

This attitude shows that digital competence extends beyond finding information to regulating one's responses. INF-13 added, *"Before sharing a sermon in a group, I consider whether it is useful or might offend my friends."* These experiences indicate the emergence of social and moral considerations in students' digital activities. Although not yet consistent across all students, the movement from spontaneous reaction toward considering consequences was one sign of growing resilience to manipulative religious messages.

From a mentoring perspective, the guidance and counseling teacher observed that students' vulnerability arose not only from limited religious knowledge but also from a need for acceptance and recognition. INF-o6 explained, *"Students who are experiencing friendship problems are sometimes more easily attracted to online communities that offer certainty and a sense of belonging. Therefore, we cannot simply prohibit content; we must also support their emotional condition."* This finding broadens the understanding of radicalism prevention: it requires not only correcting information but also ensuring safe social relationships at school. Individual mentoring, consultation spaces, and students' connectedness with teachers provide protective layers that complement literacy education. In other words, critical capacity works more effectively when students have a supportive social environment.

3. Contribution, Supporting Factors, and Implementation Barriers

Overall, digital religious literacy contributed to radicalism prevention through three behavioral changes. First, students became more cautious when accepting online religious authorities. Second, they began comparing messages with other sources and considering their contexts. Third, they demonstrated greater self-control when encountering provocative content. These changes should not be interpreted as eliminating all risks of radicalism; rather, they indicate the development of initial protective mechanisms involving critical doubt, verification, and consultation. Simulated observations also showed that students asked more questions when teachers used content examples closely related to their digital experiences.

The strategy was supported by school leadership involvement, teacher competence, the relevance of instructional examples to students' lives, and the availability of consultation spaces. Several barriers nevertheless remained. INF-o2 acknowledged, *"Not all teachers have the same ability to examine digital content, so implementation still depends on individual initiative."* Limited instructional time was another challenge. INF-o5 explained, *"Analyzing a single video in depth takes time, while the required subject matter must still be completed."* From the students' perspective, INF-o8 noted that the speed and appeal of short videos often made verification feel burdensome. These barriers reveal a gap between the demands of critical literacy and the fast-paced nature of digital information consumption.

Peers emerged as a factor that could strengthen program sustainability. INF-14 explained, *“Content created by students is usually more readily accepted by their friends because the language does not feel patronizing. We try to create short messages about tabayyun and respect for differences.”* This initiative shows that students were not merely program recipients but could also produce alternative religious narratives. INF-03 likewise noted that the involvement of Rohis leaders and student organizations helped the school reach communication spaces that teachers could not always enter. Nevertheless, student-produced content still required mentoring so that simplified messages would not create new misconceptions. Teacher student collaboration was therefore essential to balance substantive accuracy with communicative appeal.

The findings as a whole demonstrate that digital religious literacy functions as a preventive strategy when implemented in multiple layers. School policy provides legitimacy; Islamic Religious Education establishes foundational knowledge and evaluative capacity; counseling services provide psychosocial support; and Rohis and peer activities extend practice into students’ everyday lives. Its effectiveness lies not in a single activity but in the interconnection among actors and the consistency of messages students receive. The strategy is more appropriately understood as resilience building than as a tool for ensuring that students are never exposed to radical content. Digital exposure is difficult to eliminate, but education can strengthen how students recognize, evaluate, and respond to it.

DISCUSSION

1. Digital Religious Literacy as an Institutional and Pedagogical Practice

The findings related to the first focus demonstrate that digital religious literacy is not an isolated technical skill but is formed through relationships among policy, learning, and school culture. Khakim (2024) emphasizes that digital religious literacy includes the ability to use relevant religious learning sources, think critically, and validate information with guidance from teachers and parents. In this study, the competence also involved evaluating the authority of speakers, the context of religious texts, the orientation of messages, and their effects on social relationships. Digital religious literacy is therefore more appropriately understood as an integrative competence combining information skills, religious knowledge, and ethical judgment.

Teachers' practices of comparing video excerpts, examining speakers' backgrounds, and connecting messages with the context of religious teachings demonstrate a shift from transmission toward interpretive learning. This finding is consistent with Khakim's (2024) argument that critical thinking and source validation are necessary to prevent students from uncritically accepting digital religious information. If students merely memorize teachings without understanding the diversity of contexts and authorities, they remain vulnerable to content that persuasively employs religious symbols. Interpretive learning helps students recognize that a religious appearance, a preacher's popularity, and large numbers of followers do not automatically guarantee interpretive accuracy.

The involvement of Rohis and the school's digital media extended literacy from content consumption to message production. This finding strengthens Machendrawaty et al.'s (2022) conclusion that the use of digital technology in moderation education can increase participation and expand the reach of peaceful religious messages. It is also consistent with Effendi et al. (2025), who emphasize the importance of presenting religious messages in visual formats relevant to young people. This study further indicates, however, that content production must be embedded within a mentoring mechanism. Digital creativity without substantive review may reproduce the very problems the program seeks to prevent, namely the oversimplification of religious teachings and the loss of context.

2. Critical Capacity and Resistance to Radical Narratives

Regarding the second focus, students' ability to identify sources, examine context, and regulate their responses indicates the development of cognitive and ethical resilience. Cognitive resilience was evident when students did not immediately accept messages simply because they were presented convincingly, whereas ethical resilience appeared in their consideration of the consequences of sharing or commenting on content. Fathurrohman et al. (2024) show that religious hoaxes often operate through logical fallacies and the framing of sensitive issues in ways that intensify polarization. Under such conditions, students' ability to recognize provocative language, decontextualized excerpts, and unclear sources becomes an important mechanism for interrupting the circulation of manipulative messages.

The findings also demonstrate that verification does not always occur through formal procedures. Students sometimes began by reading other users' comments or comparing several videos and then turned to teachers when they encountered contradictions. This pattern presents literacy as a gradual process rather than an immediately perfected competence. The school's task is not merely to judge whether students are literate but to guide their initial habits toward more accountable forms of verification. Teachers can introduce a hierarchy of sources, distinguish popularity from credibility, and demonstrate how to trace claims back to complete materials or official sources.

The tolerance, objectivity, flexibility, and openness evident in students' responses are consistent with Mustakim et al.'s (2021) findings on empowering students as agents of moderation. This study adds a psychosocial dimension through the account provided by the guidance and counseling teacher. Vulnerability to extremist groups may be related to a need for certainty, identity, and belonging, meaning that information correction alone is not always sufficient. Critical literacy needs to be supported by safe teacher-student relationships, peer acceptance, and opportunities for meaningful participation. Combining evaluative capacity with social support makes prevention strategies more responsive to students' actual needs.

3. Preventive Contribution and Conditions for Sustainability

The third focus demonstrates that the contribution of digital religious literacy to radicalism prevention is preventive and multilayered. Mustakim et al. (2021) identify tolerance, objectivity, flexibility, and openness as important values in forming agents of moderation, while Handayani and Alfida (2025) emphasize respect for diversity and the rejection of violence in digital moderation discourse. In the findings, these values were not taught as slogans but translated into digital actions: withholding judgment, checking sources, avoiding the circulation of hatred, and choosing messages that preserve social relationships. Religious moderation thus acquires an operational form when it is connected to students' everyday decisions in digital spaces.

The findings support Handayani and Alfida's (2025) conclusion that digital platforms can provide spaces for disseminating respect for diversity and rejecting violence. The same platforms, however, can accelerate extremist content because their algorithms prioritize engagement and emotion. School strategies therefore cannot rely solely on supplying positive content. Students need the capacity to recognize how platforms select, repeat, and amplify particular messages. Understanding platform logic helps students realize that frequently encountered content does not necessarily represent the most accurate religious position or the views of society as a whole.

The sustainability of the strategy depends on distributing capacity among teachers and involving students as partners. Reliance on one or two teachers makes a program vulnerable to changes in staff responsibilities. Schools need simple guidelines for evaluating content, cross-subject teacher training, consultation procedures for problematic content, and support for student message production. The time constraints identified in the findings also show that literacy does not always require lengthy sessions. Brief analyses of individual posts, source checks in routine assignments, or ethical reflection before sharing content can be integrated consistently. Through this approach, digital religious literacy becomes a sustainable learning culture rather than an incidental program.

CONCLUSION

Digital religious literacy at SMA Negeri 2 Toboali can be understood as a preventive strategy that connects Islamic Religious Education, school development programs, teacher mentoring, Rohis activities, and students' media habits. The strategy contributes to students' ability to examine source credibility, understand message context, recognize provocative language, consider ethical consequences before sharing content, and adopt tolerant religious attitudes that reject violence. Conceptually, these simulated findings position digital religious literacy as a combination of information skills, contextual religious understanding, communication ethics, and psychosocial resilience. In practical terms, schools need to integrate it consistently into learning and student development rather than treating it as an incidental program.

This study is limited to one school, a small number of informants, a relatively short observation period, and the use of research data for presentation purposes; consequently, its findings cannot be generalized or treated as empirical evidence. Future studies should employ authentic field data, involve multiple schools with different characteristics, extend the observation period, and combine qualitative inquiry with measurements of students' literacy competence. Schools are also advised to develop content-verification guidelines, strengthen teachers' digital

competence, provide consultation channels, and involve students in producing moderate religious messages.

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