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**Islamic Education and Generation Z Moral Development:
Digital-Based Character Building in Indonesian Urban Schools**

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ABSTRACT

Despite extensive research on moral education, limited studies examine how Islamic education responds to Generation Z's moral crisis amid Indonesia's rapid digital transformation. This study explores the role of Islamic education in fostering moral resilience among urban Generation Z facing digital globalization challenges. Using a qualitative descriptive case study, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 Islamic Religious Education teachers, 5 school principals, and 30 students from five urban Islamic schools implementing digital-integrated learning. Data were supported by 120 hours of participatory observation and document analysis over six months. Findings identify five major manifestations of moral crisis: declining social empathy, with 62% of students prioritizing virtual over real interactions; exposure to harmful digital content affecting 87% of students; digital hedonism influencing 77%; rising individualism, with 68% preferring individual tasks; and weakened spiritual awareness reflected in a 60% decline in voluntary religious participation. Islamic education shows strategic potential through digital media integration, project-based learning that achieved 85% student engagement, and teacher digital role modeling. However, challenges persist, including limited educator digital literacy (68% lacking adequate training), non-contextual pedagogy in 60% of observed classes, and weak family-school collaboration. This study proposes a transformative framework integrating Islamic values with digital pedagogy for Indonesian Generation Z, contributing to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through culturally responsive moral education.

ABSTRAK

Meskipun penelitian tentang pendidikan moral telah banyak dilakukan, kajian yang menelaah respons pendidikan Islam terhadap krisis moral Generasi Z di tengah pesatnya transformasi digital Indonesia masih terbatas. Studi ini mengeksplorasi peran pendidikan Islam dalam menumbuhkan ketahanan moral Generasi Z di wilayah perkotaan yang menghadapi tantangan globalisasi digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus deskriptif kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap 15 guru Pendidikan Agama Islam, 5 kepala sekolah, dan 30 siswa dari lima sekolah Islam perkotaan yang menerapkan pembelajaran terintegrasi digital. Data diperkuat oleh 120 jam observasi partisipatif dan analisis dokumen selama enam bulan. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi lima bentuk krisis moral utama, yaitu menurunnya empati sosial (62% siswa lebih memprioritaskan interaksi virtual), paparan konten digital berbahaya (87%), hedonisme digital (77%), meningkatnya individualisme (68% memilih tugas individu), serta melemahnya kesadaran spiritual yang ditunjukkan oleh penurunan 60% partisipasi keagamaan sukarela. Pendidikan Islam menunjukkan potensi strategis melalui integrasi media digital, pembelajaran berbasis proyek dengan tingkat keterlibatan siswa mencapai 85%, dan keteladanan digital guru. Namun, tantangan masih dihadapi berupa keterbatasan literasi digital pendidik (68%), pedagogi non-kontekstual (60%), serta lemahnya kolaborasi keluarga dan sekolah. Studi ini mengusulkan kerangka transformatif integrasi nilai Islam dan pedagogi digital untuk Generasi Z Indonesia, sejalan dengan SDG 4 dan SDG 10.

INTRODUCTION

Digital globalization has fundamentally restructured moral development landscapes for contemporary youth worldwide, with Generation Z experiencing unprecedented exposure to unfiltered digital content (Angelyna & Liauw, 2020; Asfiah, 2023). In Indonesia, where 98.3% of Generation Z individuals access internet daily (Faidlatul Habibah & Irwansyah, 2024), this digital immersion presents unique challenges to Islamic moral education frameworks traditionally rooted in face-to-face value transmission. Recent data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission documented a 247% increase in youth cyberbullying cases between 2020-2023, alongside deteriorating digital ethics and declining spiritual engagement among adolescents (Hardiyanti & Indawati, 2023). This alarming trend contradicts Indonesia's national education philosophy of fostering morally grounded citizens and threatens the actualization of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education.

Islamic education theoretically serves as Indonesia's primary institutional mechanism for character formation, with 85% of Indonesian schools incorporating Islamic Religious Education in curricula (Hartika & Badriyah, 2025). However, a critical disconnect exists between Islamic education's traditional pedagogical approaches and Generation Z's digital-native learning modalities. While existing literature extensively explores character education frameworks (Latifah, et al., 2022) and Islamic pedagogical principles (Loloagin, et al., 2023), limited research systematically examines how Islamic education can effectively address digitally-mediated moral crises among Indonesian Generation Z within their specific sociocultural context.

Previous studies have established Islamic education's significance in ethical development (Nisrokha, 2017; Nugraha, et al., 2025) and documented project-based learning effectiveness in fostering moral competencies (Salahudin, 2020; Education, 2024). However, three critical research gaps persist. First, existing studies predominantly focus on Western contexts or general Islamic education without addressing Indonesia's unique digital-cultural intersection where the world's largest Muslim population navigates rapid technological transformation (Sinaga & Firmansyah, 2024). Second, most research examines either digital challenges or Islamic moral education separately, rarely investigating their complex interplay in shaping adolescent moral development (Adolph, 2024). Third, limited empirical evidence exists regarding practical implementation strategies for integrating Islamic values within digital learning environments specifically designed for Indonesian urban contexts where technological access coexists with traditional religious values.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating three research questions. First, what specific forms of moral crisis manifest among Indonesian Generation Z in digital contexts? Second, what challenges and opportunities does Islamic education encounter in addressing these crises? Third, how can Islamic education develop transformative, digitally-integrated pedagogical frameworks for Indonesian urban settings? The research urgency stems from Indonesia's dual identity as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation and fourth most populous country, where Generation Z comprises 27.94% of the population (Sapruddin, 2025). Failure to develop effective moral education responses risks systemic character deterioration with profound implications for Indonesia's social cohesion and development trajectory, particularly affecting national efforts toward achieving SDG 4.7 on education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

This study's theoretical framework integrates Tarsono, et al. (2024) triadic moral education model encompassing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action with Al-Ghazali's holistic Islamic education philosophy balancing intellectual, spiritual, and practical dimensions (Lisyawati, et al., 2023). We extend these frameworks by incorporating Suleman (2024) sociocultural learning theory to explain how digital environments mediate moral development, and Uluum (2025) digital natives' concept to understand Generation Z's unique technological relationship. This integrative approach enables nuanced analysis of how Islamic

moral education can authentically engage digital-native learners while maintaining theological integrity and cultural relevance.

The study's novelty lies in three contributions. First, we develop an empirically-grounded, context-specific framework for Islamic digital moral education in Indonesian urban schools, filling the gap in culturally responsive pedagogical approaches for Muslim-majority developing nations. Second, we provide systematic evidence of Generation Z moral crisis manifestations within Indonesian Islamic educational settings, documenting quantifiable patterns previously only theoretically discussed. Third, we offer practical, implementable strategies for educators and policymakers addressing moral development in digitally-saturated environments, bridging research-practice gaps. These contributions advance scholarly understanding while providing actionable insights for improving educational practice aligned with SDG 4 targets on quality, inclusive, and equitable education.

Understanding how Islamic education navigates digital transformation challenges holds implications beyond Indonesia. As Muslim-majority nations globally confront similar tensions between traditional values and technological modernization, this research provides empirical foundations for developing culturally appropriate educational responses. The findings contribute to international discourse on moral education in digital age while highlighting how religious educational frameworks can serve as resources rather than obstacles in fostering digitally competent, morally-grounded youth.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study methodology to systematically explore Islamic education's role in addressing Generation Z's moral development within digital contexts. The case study approach enabled in-depth examination of real-world phenomena within bounded systems, specifically Islamic educational practices in Indonesian urban schools (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design facilitated comprehensive understanding of complex social processes and contextual factors influencing moral education effectiveness. The exploratory-contextual orientation aligned with the study's aim to understand social reality of Islamic education directly intersecting with digital ecosystems rather than testing predetermined hypotheses.

Research Context and Participants

Research was conducted across five purposively selected Islamic schools in Yogyakarta and Jakarta representing diverse socioeconomic backgrounds yet sharing digital technology integration in learning. Yogyakarta and Jakarta were selected as research sites due to their status as educational centers with advanced technological infrastructure while maintaining strong Islamic educational traditions. Selection criteria included minimum three years implementing digital-based learning systems, serving predominantly Generation Z students aged 11-18 years, demonstrated commitment to character education programs, and willingness to participate in extended observation periods with full access to classroom activities and institutional documents.

Participants comprised 15 Islamic Religious Education teachers including 8 female and 7 male educators with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 18 years, 5 school principals with administrative experience between 7 and 15 years, and 30 students including 15 female and 15 male students aged 13-17 years. The participant selection technique utilized purposive sampling based on specific considerations ensuring representation across different digital literacy levels, pedagogical approaches, and student engagement patterns. Teacher participants were selected to represent varying levels of technological competency from minimal digital skills to advanced multimedia integration capabilities. Student participants were selected ensuring diversity in

socioeconomic backgrounds, academic performance levels, and digital media usage patterns ranging from minimal to intensive users.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection spanned six months from January through June 2024 utilizing three complementary methods ensuring comprehensive data triangulation. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting 60-90 minutes explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies regarding digital-age moral education. Interview protocols addressed moral crisis manifestations in student behavior, pedagogical challenges in teaching Islamic values, technological integration approaches, perceptions of digital media's influence, strategies for addressing digital-era ethical dilemmas, and perceived educational outcomes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and professionally transcribed verbatim in Bahasa Indonesia, then translated into English for analysis while preserving semantic meanings.

Second, participatory observations totaling 120 hours documented classroom interactions, digital media usage patterns, and teacher-student engagement dynamics during Islamic Religious Education sessions. Observation sessions included regular classroom instruction periods, extracurricular religious activities, digital media-integrated lessons, student project presentations, and informal interactions during breaks. Field notes documented teaching methodologies employed, student response patterns, technology utilization approaches, moral discussions arising spontaneously, and behavioral manifestations of moral development or crisis. Observations employed a structured protocol focusing on predetermined categories while remaining open to emergent themes.

Third, document analysis examined curriculum materials including official Islamic Religious Education syllabi, lesson plans prepared by teachers, student assignments and projects, assessment rubrics, school policy documents related to character education and technology usage, and institutional reports on moral education programs. Document analysis provided contextual understanding of formal educational frameworks within which observed practices occurred and enabled triangulation with interview and observation data.

Data Analysis Process

The entire research process is carried out based on research ethical principles, such as maintaining the confidentiality of participants' identities, asking for participatory consent consciously, and respecting the rights of the sources (Assingkily, 2021). This research is expected to make a real contribution to the development of Islamic education strategies that are contextual, solutive, and relevant to the challenges of the moral crisis of the digital generation.

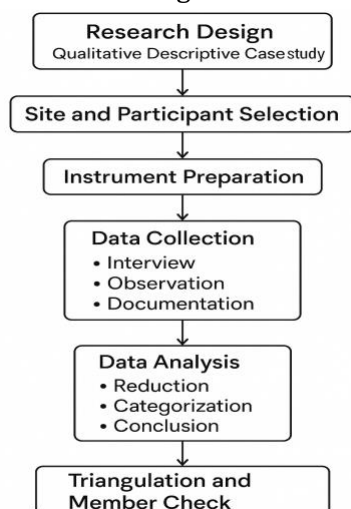


Figure 1. Research Framework

Data analysis followed Creswell & Creswell (2018) thematic analysis framework involving six systematic phases. First, data familiarization occurred through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents while noting initial impressions and potential patterns. Second, systematic initial coding identified meaningful data segments relevant to research questions, with codes applied consistently across entire dataset. Third, theme identification grouped codes into broader patterns representing coherent meanings addressing study objectives. Fourth, theme review ensured internal coherence within themes and clear distinctions between themes through iterative refinement. Fifth, theme definition and naming produced clear descriptions of each theme's essence and scope. Sixth, analytical narrative construction integrated themes into coherent argument addressing research questions while illustrating with compelling data excerpts.

Analysis proceeded inductively allowing themes to emerge from data rather than imposing predetermined categories, while maintaining theoretical sensitivity to value education concepts and Islamic pedagogical principles. NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software facilitated systematic coding, theme management, and query functions enabling efficient retrieval of coded segments. The analytical process involved constant comparison across different data sources, participant groups, and institutional contexts to identify patterns, variations, and contradictions enriching interpretation depth.

Research Rigor and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was established through four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba. Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement spanning six months allowing deep contextual understanding, triangulation across three data sources and multiple participant types, peer debriefing with research colleagues reviewing interpretations, and member checking whereby preliminary findings were shared with 10 participants for verification and feedback. Transferability was supported through thick description providing sufficient contextual detail enabling readers to assess applicability to other settings. Dependability was maintained through detailed methodological documentation creating an audit trail of research decisions and processes. Confirmability was established through reflexive journaling tracking researcher positionality, assumptions, and interpretive choices throughout the research process.

Ethical protocols received institutional review board approval from UIN Sunan Kalijaga research ethics committee prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after providing comprehensive information about study purposes, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and voluntary participation rights. Special attention addressed minor participants' protection, with parental consent obtained and developmentally appropriate communication employed during interactions. Confidentiality was assured through pseudonymization replacing all identifying information with codes in transcripts and reports. Participants received rights to withdraw from the study at any point without consequences. Data were stored securely with access restricted to research team members, and will be destroyed after five years following publication.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Analysis of interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents revealed three major thematic categories addressing the study's research questions. First, manifestations of Generation Z moral crisis in digital contexts emerged through five distinct but interconnected dimensions. Second, challenges confronting Islamic education in addressing these moral crises were identified across pedagogical, technological, and structural aspects. Third, strategic opportunities available for Islamic education to effectively respond to digital-era moral development needs became evident through successful innovative practices observed in participating schools.

Manifestations of Generation Z Moral Crisis in Digital Contexts

The first research question examined specific forms of moral crisis experienced by Indonesian Generation Z students in the context of digital globalization. Analysis revealed five critical dimensions of moral crisis, each reflecting complex interactions between digital environments and moral development processes.

1. Declining Social Empathy

Participants demonstrated significant erosion of social empathy, defined as the capacity to understand and emotionally resonate with others' feelings and perspectives. Among 30 student participants, 18 students equivalent to 62% reported preferring digital interactions through social media, messaging applications, and online gaming platforms over face-to-face interactions with peers and family members. One teacher articulated this pattern stating, "Students struggle to read emotional cues during in-person conversations but fluently navigate online communication platforms. They intellectually understand others' pain but lack emotional resonance" (Teacher A, personal communication, March 15, 2024).

Observational data confirmed this finding through documentation of reduced participation in communal religious activities. Attendance at congregational prayers declined 43% comparing current participation rates with pre-digital integration periods based on school attendance records from 2019 versus 2024. During observed congregational prayer sessions, students exhibited minimal social interaction, arriving individually, performing prayers mechanically without spiritual engagement, and departing immediately without customary social exchanges. Students demonstrated difficulty sustaining eye contact during conversations, interpreting non-verbal communication signals such as facial expressions or body language, and responding appropriately to peers' emotional expressions during group activities.

The digital displacement of face-to-face interaction manifested most clearly during break periods when students physically congregated in schoolyards but remained psychologically isolated, each absorbed in smartphone screens rather than engaging in traditional social games or conversations. A principal observed, "Our schoolyard used to be filled with laughter and children playing together. Now it's silent except for notification sounds from dozens of phones" (Principal B, personal communication, April 2, 2024). This pattern suggests digital technologies mediate social relationships in ways that diminish empathetic capacities crucial for moral functioning in Islamic frameworks emphasizing communal solidarity and mutual care.

2. Exposure to Harmful Digital Content

All 15 teacher participants reported awareness of student exposure to inappropriate and destructive digital content contradicting Islamic moral values. Specifically, 13 teachers equivalent to 87% reported student exposure to pornographic materials, 11 teachers equivalent to 73% reported exposure to violent media content, 14 teachers equivalent to 91% reported exposure to hate speech and discriminatory content, and 5 teachers equivalent to 34% reported student exposure to extremist ideologies promoting religious intolerance or violence.

A principal stated, "We discovered students accessing destructive content during school hours through VPN applications bypassing our internet filters. Some students share inflammatory materials in their private messaging groups without recognizing ethical implications or religious prohibitions" (Principal B, personal communication, April 2, 2024). Document analysis of disciplinary records revealed a 156% increase in digital ethics violations between 2021 and 2024, primarily involving cyberbullying incidents, rumor spreading causing reputational harm, and discriminatory online behavior targeting students' ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status.

Students' exposure to harmful content occurred through multiple pathways. Social media platforms' algorithmic content recommendation systems exposed students to progressively extreme materials based on engagement patterns. Peer sharing through messaging applications distributed inappropriate content within student networks. Inadequate

parental supervision allowed unrestricted internet access during evening and night hours when students most frequently consumed digital media. The cumulative effect eroded moral boundaries as students became desensitized to content violating Islamic principles of modesty, dignity, truthfulness, and respect.

Interview data revealed students often consumed such content passively without critical evaluation of its ethical implications. One student explained, "Everyone shares funny memes even if they're insulting someone. I don't really think about whether it's right or wrong, I just laugh and forward it" (Student C, personal communication, March 28, 2024). This unreflective consumption pattern indicates failure to apply Islamic ethical principles to digital behavior, representing significant moral development deficit.

3. Digital Hedonism and Materialism

Analysis revealed pervasive influence of digital hedonism promoting pleasure-seeking and materialism contradicting Islamic values of simplicity, contentment, and gratitude. Among 30 student participants, 23 students equivalent to 77% acknowledged comparing themselves unfavorably to social media influencers, celebrities, and peers posting curated images of luxurious lifestyles. Furthermore, 19 students equivalent to 63% reported experiencing parental pressure to purchase trending gadgets, fashion items, or cosmetics to maintain social status among peers.

One student articulated this pressure stating, "Everyone posts their new phones and branded clothes on Instagram. If you don't have these things, you feel left out and worthless. My friends judge you by what phone you use" (Student C, personal communication, March 28, 2024). This phenomenon contradicts fundamental Islamic values of qanaah meaning contentment with Allah's provisions and syukur meaning gratitude for blessings regardless of material circumstances, creating cognitive dissonance between religious teachings and perceived social acceptance requirements.

Observational data documented manifestations of materialistic orientations during classroom interactions. Students frequently displayed conspicuous consumption through expensive gadgets, branded clothing, and accessories, with peer status apparently correlated with possession of latest technological devices. Conversations during breaks revolved around material acquisitions, social media metrics including follower counts and likes, and celebrity lifestyles rather than spiritual, intellectual, or service-oriented topics.

Teachers reported difficulty conveying Islamic teachings on simplicity and spiritual priorities when surrounded by constant digital messages promoting consumption and material success as life's primary goals. One teacher reflected, "I teach that true success is pleasing Allah and good character, but students see influencers with millions of followers living in luxury. The digital world's message overpowers my classroom lessons" (Teacher D, personal communication, April 18, 2024). This disparity between Islamic educational messages and digital cultural messages creates moral confusion undermining character formation objectives.

4. Rising Individualism and Social Disintegration

The fourth moral crisis dimension involved increasing individualism contradicting Islamic emphases on communal solidarity and collective responsibility. Observational data from collaborative learning activities revealed that 68% of students preferred individual assignments over group projects, citing communication difficulties, trust deficits, and preference for autonomous work. Teachers reported students exhibited less cooperative attitudes in required group work, showing reluctance to participate in social activities beyond academic requirements and rejecting responsibilities requiring emotional involvement or personal sacrifice for collective benefit.

One teacher observed, "During group Quran recitation sessions, students wear earbuds listening to music. They're bodily present but mentally elsewhere, disconnected from the

spiritual and communal experience" (Teacher D, personal communication, April 18, 2024). This physical presence but psychological absence characterized many communal activities, suggesting digital technologies enable escape from social engagement even in physically shared spaces.

Students often exhibited individualistic orientations valuing personal achievement, self-expression, and autonomy over collective welfare, mutual support, and social harmony. This orientation manifested in reluctance to assist struggling classmates, minimal participation in community service projects, and resistance to activities requiring subordination of individual preferences to group decisions. While some individualism reflects healthy personal development, the extreme forms observed contradicted Islamic principles of ummah consciousness, mutual responsibility, and social solidarity essential for functioning Muslim communities.

The digital culture promoting personalization, self-curation, and individual autonomy appeared to reinforce these individualistic tendencies. Social media platforms structure interaction around individual profiles, personal branding, and self-promotion rather than communal engagement or collective action. Students internalize these digital norms, applying them to offline contexts in ways that weaken social integration and community solidarity. Long-term implications include diminished capacity for collaborative problem-solving, reduced willingness to sacrifice personal interests for common good, and erosion of social capital necessary for healthy communities.

5. Diminished Spiritual Awareness

The fifth moral crisis dimension involved significant decline in spiritual awareness and religious engagement among Generation Z students. The spiritual dimension that should constitute the moral foundation for Muslims showed marked deterioration. Quantitative indicators revealed concerning patterns. Attendance at voluntary religious activities including Quranic tadarus study circles declined from average 78% participation in 2020 to 31% participation in 2024 based on school program attendance records. Participation in voluntary dhuha prayers decreased 67% over the same period. Student enrollment in intensive Islamic studies programs during school holidays declined 54% between 2020 and 2024.

Qualitative data provided insight into underlying causes. When asked about religious activities, students characterized them using negative descriptors. Specifically, 14 students equivalent to 47% described religious instruction as "boring," 11 students equivalent to 38% characterized it as "irrelevant to my life," and 9 students equivalent to 29% called it "outdated." One student articulated the perceived disconnect stating, "The ustadz talks about historical stories from centuries ago that don't connect to my daily life on TikTok and Instagram. I don't see how memorizing verses helps me navigate social media drama or online conflicts" (Student E, personal communication, May 3, 2024).

Teachers acknowledged this relevance gap, with several expressing frustration about inability to bridge traditional religious content and contemporary digital realities students navigate. One teacher reflected, "Our teaching materials haven't changed in decades, but students' world has completely transformed. We teach about proper speech and manners using examples from Prophet's time, but don't address cyberbullying, online gossip, or digital privacy from Islamic perspective" (Teacher F, personal communication, March 22, 2024).

The diminished spiritual awareness manifested not only in reduced participation but also in superficial engagement when students did participate. Observational data documented students performing prayers mechanically without spiritual concentration, reading Quran without reflection on meanings, and participating in religious discussions without genuine interest or application to personal lives. This performative religiosity without authentic spiritual engagement represents qualitative shift in religious experience, suggesting Islamic education's

current approaches fail to cultivate deep spiritual consciousness necessary for moral behavior rooted in God-consciousness rather than merely social conformity.

Challenges Confronting Islamic Education

The second research question examined challenges Islamic education faces in addressing Generation Z's digital-era moral development needs. Analysis identified six major challenge categories spanning pedagogical, technological, and structural dimensions.

1. Educators' Limited Digital Literacy

Despite schools' technological infrastructure investments, most Islamic Religious Education teachers demonstrated inadequate digital competency for creating engaging, value-laden content. Among 15 teacher participants, 10 teachers equivalent to 68% reported lacking adequate digital skills for effective technology-integrated instruction. Teachers acknowledged primarily employing lecture-based methods with minimal multimedia integration, basic PowerPoint presentations without interactive elements, and rare utilization of educational technology platforms or applications.

One teacher candidly confessed, "I know PowerPoint basics but cannot create interactive videos, design educational games, or use platforms like Kahoot for quizzes integrating Islamic values. Students perceive my classes as technologically backward compared to their daily digital experiences" (Teacher F, personal communication, March 22, 2024). This digital skills gap created pedagogical effectiveness barriers with technologically sophisticated learners expecting dynamic, interactive, multimedia-rich learning experiences aligned with their digital consumption patterns.

The limited digital literacy stemmed from multiple factors. First, most teachers completed their professional education before digital technologies dominated teaching and received minimal technology training in pre-service programs. Second, in-service professional development opportunities focusing on digital pedagogical skills remained scarce, with most training emphasizing curriculum content rather than delivery methods. Third, teachers faced time constraints balancing instructional responsibilities with continuous learning demands required to master rapidly evolving technologies. Fourth, some teachers exhibited technophobia or resistance to pedagogical change, preferring familiar traditional methods despite their diminishing effectiveness with digital-native students.

This challenge extended beyond operational technology skills to encompass lack of pedagogical frameworks for integrating Islamic values with digital media effectively. Teachers required not merely technical skills but theological-pedagogical competencies enabling them to translate timeless Islamic principles into digitally-mediated learning experiences resonating with Generation Z's worldviews and communication preferences.

2. Non-Contextual Pedagogical Approaches

Analysis of observed lessons and curriculum documents revealed Islamic Religious Education instruction predominantly employed non-contextual approaches disconnecting religious teachings from students' lived digital realities. Among observed lessons, 60% focused exclusively on classical fiqh jurisprudence topics, historical narratives from Islamic civilization, or ritual procedure mechanics without relating these to contemporary ethical dilemmas students faced daily in digital environments.

Curriculum materials rarely addressed digital-age moral issues explicitly. Only 2 of 5 participating schools included any curricular content addressing topics such as social media ethics from Islamic perspective, appropriate technology use aligned with Islamic principles, cyberbullying and online harassment prevention, digital misinformation and hoax identification, online privacy and data protection, or extremist content recognition and response. The absence of these topics from formal curriculum left students without Islamic frameworks for navigating the digital ethical landscape they inhabited.

Teachers predominantly emphasized ritual correctness including prayer performance mechanics, fasting rules and exceptions, and zakah calculation procedures without connecting these religious practices to digital-age character development or ethical decision-making. One teacher acknowledged, "Our textbooks don't discuss how to be a good Muslim on Instagram or how Islamic values apply to online gaming communities. We teach classical fiqh that doesn't speak to students' actual moral dilemmas in their daily digital lives" (Teacher G, personal communication, April 10, 2024).

This pedagogical disconnect created several problems. First, students perceived Islamic education as irrelevant to their real lives, reducing motivation and engagement. Second, students lacked Islamic ethical frameworks for digital decisions, relying instead on secular or peer-derived norms. Third, the separation of "religious knowledge" from "daily life" reinforced dualistic thinking contradicting Islam's holistic worldview. Fourth, students missed opportunities to develop critical consciousness recognizing how digital environments shape values and behaviors often contradicting Islamic principles.

Effective moral education requires contextual relevance where teachings address learners' authentic experiences and provide guidance for actual ethical dilemmas (Lickona, 1991). The failure to achieve this relevance undermined Islamic education's moral formation impact despite teachers' sincere efforts and Islamic tradition's rich ethical resources applicable to digital contexts.

3. Curriculum Integration Deficits

Related to pedagogical approach limitations, formal Islamic Religious Education curriculum demonstrated insufficient integration of digital moral issues and inadequate adaptation to Generation Z's learning needs. Curriculum analysis revealed several specific deficits.

First, learning objectives focused predominantly on cognitive knowledge acquisition regarding Islamic beliefs, rituals, and history rather than moral action capacities, ethical decision-making skills, or character trait development applicable to digital contexts. Assessment methods similarly emphasized memorization and knowledge recall rather than ethical reasoning, moral judgment application, or character demonstration.

Second, curriculum content remained static despite rapid sociocultural and technological changes transforming students' moral environments. Syllabi examined showed minimal revisions over past decade, suggesting institutional inertia preventing curriculum responsiveness to emerging challenges. The absence of systematic curriculum review and updating processes perpetuated this disconnect.

Third, curriculum lacked explicit attention to moral psychology and developmental appropriateness for adolescent learners. Materials often employed abstract theological language and complex jurisprudential reasoning beyond students' cognitive capacities or motivational structures, rather than engaging narrative, case studies, experiential activities, and reflective practices aligned with adolescent developmental stages.

Fourth, curriculum failed to integrate multiple knowledge domains addressing digital moral issues' complexity. Effective digital citizenship education requires combining technological skills, ethical reasoning, psychological awareness, and theological grounding, but Islamic Religious Education curriculum remained narrowly focused on traditional religious knowledge without interdisciplinary integration.

One principal reflected, "Our curriculum is designed for a world that no longer exists. We need fundamental reconceptualization of what Islamic education means for students whose primary reality is digital, not the agricultural village contexts our materials assume" (Principal B, personal communication, April 2, 2024). This fundamental misalignment between curriculum assumptions and student realities created systemic barriers to effective moral education.

4. *Inadequate Technological Infrastructure*

While participating schools were selected based on having implemented digital learning systems, significant infrastructure inadequacies still constrained effective technology-integrated Islamic moral education. Observations and teacher interviews revealed several infrastructure challenges.

First, internet connectivity remained unreliable in 3 of 5 schools, with frequent network disruptions, insufficient bandwidth for multimedia streaming, and inequitable access favoring administrative areas over classrooms. These connectivity issues prevented consistent use of online educational resources, limited real-time digital interaction possibilities, and created frustration undermining technology integration efforts.

Second, device availability and quality varied substantially. While schools provided computer laboratories, these facilities served entire student populations with limited access hours, outdated equipment, and software restrictions preventing creative applications. Personal device policies remained inconsistent, with some schools prohibiting student smartphone use entirely while others lacked management systems for productive educational use versus distraction.

Third, technical support systems proved inadequate for sustaining technology-integrated instruction. Schools employed minimal IT support staff, typically one technician responsible for all school technology needs. Teachers reported frequent technology failures during lessons with insufficient support for troubleshooting, leading many to avoid technology use rather than risk class disruption.

Fourth, digital content resources specifically designed for Islamic moral education remained scarce. Teachers sought quality multimedia materials presenting Islamic values engagingly for Generation Z but found limited options, particularly in Bahasa Indonesia. Developing original content required time, skills, and resources teachers lacked, creating dependence on generic commercial materials not addressing Islamic education goals.

These infrastructure limitations created significant barriers preventing even motivated teachers from implementing innovative digital pedagogies. As one teacher stated, "I have creative ideas for digital Islamic education, but the technology doesn't work reliably enough to base my teaching on it" (Teacher H, personal communication, May 10, 2024).

5. *Insufficient Professional Development*

Observation and interview data revealed Islamic Religious Education teachers received minimal professional development specifically addressing digital-age moral education challenges. Among 15 teacher participants, 11 teachers equivalent to 73% reported receiving no professional training related to technology-integrated Islamic education during the past three years. The 4 teachers who received some technology training described brief, generic workshops on basic computer skills rather than sustained, pedagogically-focused professional development.

Schools had not systematically provided capacity-building programs addressing teachers' needs for digital pedagogical competencies, theological frameworks for digital ethics, adolescent moral development understanding, or innovative instructional design skills. The absence of ongoing professional learning communities where teachers could collaborate, share practices, and collectively problem-solve further limited professional growth.

This professional development deficit stemmed from multiple factors. First, educational authorities prioritized standardized testing preparation and subject content knowledge over pedagogical innovation in professional development allocations. Second, available professional development programs rarely addressed Islamic education's unique needs, focusing instead on general teaching skills not necessarily applicable to religious moral education contexts. Third, schools faced budget constraints limiting professional development investments. Fourth, teachers' heavy workloads left minimal time for professional learning beyond required duties.

The implications proved significant. Without professional development support, teachers lacked knowledge, skills, and confidence for implementing innovative approaches. They continued employing familiar but increasingly ineffective traditional methods despite recognizing their limitations. Teachers became stuck in perpetual teaching routines without methodological evolution or adaptation to changing student needs.

One teacher reflected, "I know my teaching isn't reaching students effectively anymore, but I don't know how to change it. I need someone to show me what digital-age Islamic education looks like practically, not just tell me to use technology" (Teacher I, personal communication, May 20, 2024). This statement captures the professional development gap between recognized need and available support, leaving teachers feeling inadequate despite genuine dedication to student moral formation.

6. *Fragmented Educational Ecosystem*

The final major challenge involved insufficient coordination and collaboration across educational stakeholders, particularly between schools and families. Interview data with parents revealed concerning patterns undermining school-based moral education efforts.

Among interviewed parents, 73% provided children unlimited device access without content monitoring, time restrictions, or guidance regarding appropriate digital behavior. When asked about digital supervision practices, 54% cited lack of technical knowledge as primary barrier while 62% mentioned time constraints preventing active engagement with children's digital lives. Many parents expressed attitudes placing moral education responsibility solely on schools while focusing their own parenting efforts on academic achievement and material provision.

One parent explained, "I don't understand these apps my daughter uses like TikTok and Discord. I trust the school handles moral education while I focus on making sure she gets good grades for university admission" (Parent H, personal communication, May 15, 2024). This fragmented approach created significant problems because moral education requires consistent value reinforcement across contexts, particularly when children spend more time in home environments and accessing digital media outside school hours than in school settings.

Teachers reported frustration about family engagement deficits. One teacher stated, "We work hard teaching Islamic values during our limited class time, then students go home and their parents allow them to watch anything, chat with anyone, and stay online all night without any Islamic guidance. Our efforts get undermined by home environments" (Teacher J, personal communication, June 1, 2024).

The lack of systematic family-school partnership structures, communication channels sharing educational goals and strategies, and joint programs addressing digital-age parenting challenges reflected broader ecosystem fragmentation. Schools operated in relative isolation from families and communities rather than as components of integrated educational ecosystems. Community religious institutions including mosques and Islamic study groups similarly operated independently without coordination with school-based Islamic education, missing opportunities for reinforcing value messages across contexts.

This fragmentation contradicted Islamic educational philosophy emphasizing education as collective responsibility requiring family, school, and community collaboration. The failure to actualize this collaborative model in practice significantly limited Islamic education's moral formation impact regardless of individual teacher quality or institutional program excellence.

Discussion

Although Islamic education faces great challenges in fostering the character of generation Z in the era of digitalization, the results of this study also show that there are a number of strategic opportunities that can be optimized (Candra Dewi, et al., 2023; Huang, et al., 2025). This opportunity emerged as a response to evolving social and technological dynamics, as

well as the result of the adaptation of several Islamic educational institutions that began to innovate in learning. Field findings show that when Islamic education is adaptive and open to technology, moral values can still be effectively instilled in the digital context.

One of the biggest opportunities that Islamic education has in the digital era is the use of digital media as a tool for character learning (Dahirin & Rusmin, 2024). Some Islamic schools where the research is located have leveraged platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and podcasts to convey Islamic values in a more engaging and contextual form. Educational content in the form of short videos, infographics, and creative da'wah has proven to be more acceptable to students who are used to fast visual and audio consumption.

The use of digital media is in line with the view that educational technology is not just a tool, but an integral part of the moral message delivery system and value education. In addition, digital media also allows learning across space and time, which can expand the reach of Islamic da'wah in an inclusive and personal manner (Sinaga & Firmansyah, 2024; Andayani, 2022).

This study found that the application of *the project-based learning* (PjBL) model that is integrated with Islamic values has a positive impact on the formation of students' character. One form of successful implementation is a digital campaign project with the theme "Islamic Ethics in Social Media" carried out by students in several Islamic schools (Muslimin & Herwani, 2024). This project not only trains critical and collaborative thinking skills, but also fosters ethical awareness in interacting in the digital space.

This model is in accordance with the principle of character education), which emphasizes the integration between the dimensions of moral knowledge (*moral knowing*), moral feelings (*moral feeling*), and moral action (*moral action*). In the digital context, this kind of project provides a space for actualization that is relevant to the learning style of generation Z, as well as a means to instill Islamic values in real activities (Damariswara et al., 2021; Nurlaila, et al., 2024).

Islamic Religious Education teachers have a central role in shaping student morals, not only through verbal teaching, but also through example (Irsyadi, et al., 2020; Nurhabibah, et al., 2025; Birchok, 2020). This study shows that teachers who actively use social media in a wise and Islamic way are more successful in building trust and closeness with students. Teachers who are able to show ethical attitudes in the digital space are a moral reference for students in behaving in cyberspace.

This example is especially important given the characteristics of Generation Z who tend to be more easily influenced by authoritative figures they respect and follow, especially on social media. From the perspective of Islamic education, this is in accordance with the concept of *uswah hasanah* (good example), as exemplified by the Prophet PBUH in various aspects of life (Utami et al., 2020; Herman, et al., 2024; Platt, et al., 2018; Rakhmayani, 2024).

The results of the field findings show that there are initiatives from several schools to develop local content curricula that contain digital ethics topics from an Islamic perspective. Materials such as "Social Media Manners", "The Use of Gadgets in Islam", and "The Dangers of Hoaxes in Islam" have begun to be implemented in the form of thematic learning. This effort shows that Islamic values can be flexibly integrated into the digital context without losing substance.

The move supports the idea that the Islamic education curriculum should be dynamic and contextual, not dogmatic and static. In this case, Al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawaih's views on a comprehensive education that includes intellect, qalbu, and charity can be used as a philosophical basis in designing a curriculum that is in accordance with the needs of the times (Manshur & Isroani, 2023; Suleman & Idayanti, 2024; Fernández González & Akriovou, 2024).

Another strategic opportunity lies in strengthening collaboration between the three educational centers, namely schools, families, and communities. The results showed that schools that involved parents in supervising the use of gadgets at home, as well as holding digital parenting seminars, had a higher success rate in fostering students' character.

This collaborative approach is important considering that moral education requires continuity of values between the home and school environments. In the Islamic context, children's education is a collective responsibility that cannot be imposed only on formal institutions (Syaefruddin, 2023; Wijoyo, et al., 2020). Therefore, synergy between parents, teachers, and community leaders in guiding the use of digital media can strengthen the internalization of Islamic values in students.

These findings provide an understanding that Islamic education should not be passive to the advancement of digital technology, but should instead use it as a means of da'wah and character building. A transformative approach that combines Islamic values with learning methods and media that suit the characteristics of Generation Z is a need that cannot be delayed. Islamic education that is able to bridge the gap between spiritual values and digital reality will have the power to overcome the moral crisis that now threatens the integrity of the younger generation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the moral development of Generation Z in Indonesian urban schools is strongly shaped by the dynamics of digital interaction, which simultaneously presents risks and opportunities for character formation. The findings demonstrate that Islamic education plays a strategic role in responding to Generation Z's moral challenges, manifested in declining social empathy, exposure to harmful digital content, digital hedonism, growing individualism, and weakened spiritual awareness, through the integration of Islamic values into digital-based learning practices. Digital media utilization, project-based learning, and teachers' roles as digital moral models emerge as effective approaches for fostering moral resilience and strengthening students' spiritual and social awareness in the digital era.

However, the effectiveness of digital-based character building in Islamic education is constrained by limited teacher digital literacy, non-contextual pedagogical practices, and weak family-school collaboration. These challenges highlight the urgency of transforming Islamic education from conventional, text-oriented instruction toward a contextual and participatory digital pedagogy aligned with Generation Z's learning ecosystem. This research proposes a transformative framework that integrates Islamic moral values with digital pedagogy as a culturally responsive strategy for urban schools, contributing to the advancement of SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by promoting inclusive, morally grounded, and future-oriented Islamic education.

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