



The Contribution of Islamic Religious Education to Preventing the Moral Crisis of Generation Z

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Abstract

Generation Z is a cohort that has grown up in the digital era, characterized by rapid technological advancement, global connectivity, and nearly unlimited access to information. While these conditions provide significant opportunities for creativity, innovation, and critical thinking, they also present increasingly complex moral challenges, including rising individualism, consumerist behavior, declining social sensitivity, and weakened ethical awareness in daily interactions. This situation highlights the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) as a means of internalizing moral values and shaping students' character. This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Education in fostering the morality of Generation Z within the context of digital life. The research employs a literature review method by critically examining relevant scientific books, national and international journal articles, and previous studies related to religious education and character development. The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education plays a significant role in shaping the morality of Generation Z through four main aspects: value-based curriculum development emphasizing moral and character reinforcement; teachers' exemplary behavior as influential moral role models; creative and contextual use of digital media to transform religious values into more engaging forms; and collaboration among schools, families, and communities to create a sustainable educational ecosystem. These findings affirm that Islamic Religious Education functions as a relevant moral safeguard in addressing the challenges of globalization and digitalization. This study contributes a conceptual foundation for developing adaptive Islamic Religious Education models aligned with the characteristics of Generation Z and provides direction for future research to empirically examine the implementation and effectiveness of digital-based Islamic Religious Education strategies in contemporary educational settings.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education; Generation Z; Moral Crisis; Character Education

Abstrak

Generasi Z merupakan kelompok yang tumbuh dalam era digital dengan akses teknologi dan informasi yang sangat luas, yang di satu sisi membuka peluang bagi pengembangan kreativitas dan pola pikir kritis, namun di sisi lain memunculkan berbagai tantangan moral seperti meningkatnya individualisme, perilaku konsumtif, rendahnya kepedulian sosial, serta melemahnya kesadaran etika. Kondisi tersebut menuntut peran strategis Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) sebagai sarana internalisasi nilai moral dan pembentukan karakter peserta didik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran PAI dalam membentuk moralitas generasi Z di tengah dinamika kehidupan digital. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi literatur dengan menelaah secara kritis buku ilmiah, jurnal nasional dan internasional, serta hasil penelitian yang relevan dengan pendidikan agama dan karakter generasi Z. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa PAI memiliki peran signifikan dalam pembentukan moral generasi Z melalui empat aspek utama, yaitu pengembangan kurikulum berbasis nilai yang menekankan penguatan akhlak, keteladanan guru sebagai figur moral, pemanfaatan media digital secara kreatif dan kontekstual, serta kolaborasi antara sekolah, keluarga, dan masyarakat dalam menciptakan ekosistem pendidikan yang berkelanjutan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa PAI berfungsi sebagai banteng moral yang relevan dalam menghadapi tantangan globalisasi dan digitalisasi. Penelitian ini berkontribusi sebagai landasan konseptual bagi pengembangan model PAI yang adaptif terhadap karakter generasi Z serta membuka peluang bagi penelitian selanjutnya untuk mengkaji implementasi empiris dan efektivitas strategi PAI berbasis digital dalam konteks pendidikan kontemporer.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Agama Islam; Generasi Z; Krisis Moral; Pendidikan Karakter



Introduction

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is a generation that lives in a rapidly evolving digital era. Their lives are inseparable from technological devices, high-speed internet, artificial intelligence, and social media, which shape the way they think, communicate, and interact. This generation is even called the hyper-connected generation because of their extremely high level of digital connectedness (Tapscott, 2009; Prensky, 2010). They grew up in an environment that was instantaneous, dynamic, and full of easy access to information, thus possessing much higher digital skills than previous generations (Almahendra, 2023; Williams & Page, 2011).

On the positive side, Generation Z is known for being adaptive, creative, innovative, multitasking, and possessing strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills. They are quick to process information, able to exploit digital opportunities, and open to change. These skills are valuable assets for facing future global challenges, especially in the context of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0 (Fukuyama, 2018; Schwab, 2017). However, various literature shows that Generation Z also faces very complex moral challenges. The unstoppable flow of information, a global culture with minimal value filters, the phenomenon of virality, and the rapid influence of social media often give rise to moral disorientation in adolescents. Value degradation such as increased self-centeredness, low social sensitivity, excessive consumer behavior, cyberbullying, gadget addiction, aggressive behavior, and poor digital ethics are issues that have been widely highlighted (Husaini, 2015; Wulandari, 2020; Putri & Lestari, 2021). Furthermore, UNESCO (2020) noted that digital generation youth are vulnerable to identity crises, mental health issues due to social media exposure, and increased unethical behavior such as plagiarism, the spread of hoaxes, and social manipulation. This phenomenon indicates that technology, which should be a productive tool, can actually trigger emotional, social, and moral instability.

In the context of these problems, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role as a moral bulwark that shapes students' character. PAI is not merely



a normative subject, but rather a holistic educational process encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions to develop a personality with noble character (Arifin, 2016; Ramayulis, 2018). Through Islamic values such as honesty, responsibility, etiquette, empathy, brotherhood, and self-control, PAI serves as a comprehensive instrument for addressing the moral challenges of the digital generation.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) also excels in its ability to integrate religious values with modern life. Islamic teachings require humans to maintain a balance between rationality and spirituality, between knowledge and morality, and between freedom and responsibility (Nata, 2014; Al-Attas, 1993). Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) can be a platform for instilling relevant moral values for Generation Z through contextual and applicable methods. Character building through PAI can be achieved through several key strategies: First, developing a value-based curriculum. Learning emphasizes the integration of moral values throughout the teaching material, not just in specific chapters. Students are encouraged to understand values through reflection, dialogue, case studies, and real-life learning experiences (Samani & Hariyanto, 2012; Suyadi, 2020). Second, teacher role models. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers hold a strategic position as figures who demonstrate moral behavior in real life. Role modelling has long been the most effective method of Islamic education, as emphasized by classical educational figures (Zuhdi, 2019; Al-Ghazali, 1988). Third, the use of digital media for Islamic education (PAI) preaching and education can be delivered through digital approaches such as educational videos, interactive learning, digital Quran applications, gamification, and digital storytelling. These methods are in line with the visual and interactive learning styles of Generation Z (Shidiq, 2021; Huda & Kartanegara, 2020). Fourth, collaboration between schools, parents, and the community. Moral education cannot be solely carried out in schools. The family and community environment must become ecosystems that support consistent character formation (Nuryanto, 2022; Ahmad, 2021).



Thus, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in preventing a moral crisis in Generation Z. Amidst the unstoppable dynamics of the digital era, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) can serve as a spiritual and ethical foundation that guides the younger generation to maintain their identity, noble morals, and the ability to filter out the negative influences of globalization. This study is expected to provide a comprehensive view that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is an urgent need to build a Generation Z with character, morals, and integrity.

Research Methods

This research employed a library research method. Data were obtained from various sources, including books, national journals, scientific articles, and academic publications relevant to the topics of Islamic religious education, Generation Z, and the moral crisis. Analysis was conducted by classifying the literature by theme and then linking it to current educational realities (Fadilah, 2021; Kurniawan, 2020).

Results and Discussion

Education Islam and Its Goals

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a central role in Indonesia's national education system. PAI focuses not only on teaching religious knowledge but also on character formation and personality development based on Islamic values. According to Ramayulis (2018), PAI is a development process aimed at fostering faith, piety, and noble morals through education, teaching, and real-life experiences.

In the context of modern education, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) must be adaptive to technological developments and social change. Muhamimin (2011) emphasized that the challenges of globalization require PAI to present a more integrative and contextual approach. This means that PAI must be able to connect Islamic values with the realities of students' lives, including social interactions, the digital world, and cultural dynamics. Some of the goals of PAI according to experts include: First, growing faith and piety. Arifin (2017) stated that the core of PAI is



to strengthen the relationship between humans and God and shape individuals who submit to His teachings. Forming noble morals According to Nata (2016), morals are an indicator of the success of Islamic education. Students must be able to demonstrate Islamic behavior in their daily lives. Second, developing spiritual and moral intelligence. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) not only teaches material, but also improves self-reflection, self-control, and high moral awareness. Third, it prepares students to become responsible citizens. Hasan (2010) emphasized that Islamic Religious Education must produce individuals who are able to contribute positively to society. Fourth, it integrates faith, knowledge, and good deeds.

Achmadi (2016) stated that Islamic education must build synergy between scientific knowledge and religious values. According to Noer (2020), the functions of Islamic Religious Education include: 1) Value transformation, 2) Internalization, 3) Personality development, and 4) Social control.

Islamic Religious Education also has a preventive function, preventing students from moral deviations and negative behaviors that often arise from the influence of technology and the social environment. Experts have proposed several effective approaches to Islamic Religious Education: the theological-normative approach, the psychological approach, the sociological approach, the pedagogical approach, and the contextual approach.

Madjid emphasized that Islamic Religious Education must maintain the relevance between religious texts and the context of life. First, Generation Z and Moral Challenges. Generation Z or iGeneration is an age group that is very close to the digital world. They were born and grew up in an environment that is globally connected through the internet, social media, and digital devices. According to Twenge (2018), this generation has unique characteristics: fast, critical, adaptive, but vulnerable to social pressure and external influences. According to Almahendra (2023) and Prensky (2012), the characteristics of Generation Z include: 1). Digital native: living in an online world. 2). Multitasking: accustomed to doing many activities at once. 3). Visual oriented: likes visual content and gets bored easily. 4).



Critical and open: tends to question authority. 5). Pursuing freedom: including freedom of expression.

However, these traits are not always positive. The speed of information makes them less patient, anxious, and have difficulty focusing for long periods. Many studies have shown that Generation Z is facing a serious moral crisis. According to Muslich (2011), signs of this moral crisis include: 1). Decreased respect for teachers, parents, and authority figures. 2). Increased individualism due to social media culture. 3). Exposure to pornography and digital violence. 4). High consumerism due to digital advertising culture. 5). Weakened empathy, as interactions are increasingly conducted virtually. 6). Normalization of deviant behavior such as body shaming, cyberbullying, and hate speech. Livingstone & Third (2017) show that more than 60% of teenagers in the digital world experience behavioral changes due to negative content on social media.

Meanwhile, Fitrianah (2021) emphasized that this generation also faces an identity crisis due to excessive social comparisons through digital platforms. Globalization has led to a rapid and unfiltered influx of Western culture. Values of relativism, unlimited freedom, and a free-spirited lifestyle are often adopted without critical filtering. According to Hidayat (2020), the most noticeable effects of globalization on Generation Z are: 1). The loss of boundaries between good and evil. 2). Increased hedonistic behavior. 3). Weakening spirituality. In this situation, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) needs to emerge as a counterculture to strengthen the religious identity of Generation Z.

SecondCharacter Education in Islam. Character education in Islam is the core of the educational process. According to Al-Ghazali, morality is not only innate but can be formed through habituation, practice, and a conducive environment. Therefore, character education is not only in the form of lectures, but must be through role models and real-life experiences. There are several key concepts in Islamic character education: a. Al-Karimah Morals According to Ibn Miskawaih, morality is a mental condition that drives a person to behave without thinking. Morality can be developed through continuous practice.



b. Good Manners. Exemplary behavior is the most effective method in shaping character. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the main model of noble morality (QS. Al-Ahzab: 21). c. Tarbiyah, Ta'dib, Tazkiyah. Tarbiyah: comprehensive development that includes physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. Ta'dib: education in manners and etiquette. Tazkiyah: purification of the soul to foster spiritual tranquility.

According to Al-Attas (2011), the concept of ta'dib is the core of Islamic education because it emphasizes the restoration of human morality in relation to God, others, and nature. PAI integrates character values in the Qur'an and Hadith such as: honesty (*ṣidq*), trustworthiness, discipline, compassion, patience and trust in God, humility (*tawadhu'*), and social responsibility (*mas'uliyyah*).

Zubaedi (2018) emphasized that character formation must be carried out through three main stages: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. All three must be integrated in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) so that values are not only understood but also shape real behavior. Ridwan (2022) stated that character education in Islamic Religious Education can be implemented through: habituating worship, integrating values into learning, teacher role models, strengthening school culture, and religious experiences such as women's activities, Dhuha prayer, tadarus (recitation of the Koran), and almsgiving.

Islamic religious education also serves as a reinforcement of identity amidst the rapid growth of digital culture. According to Syafe'i (2019), Islamic-based character education can improve students' self-control, empathy, and moral awareness.

Third, Islamic Religious Education as a Moral Fortress for Generation Z.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in strengthening the morals of Generation Z, who live in the digital and globalized era. The rapid flow of information makes this generation vulnerable to changes in values. Numerous studies have shown that intense exposure to social media can influence adolescents' thinking, attitudes, and behavior (Lestari, 2021; Pratiwi, 2020). This situation demands the presence of PAI as a moral companion capable of providing a



religious, spiritual, and ethical foundation in daily life. From an Islamic educational perspective, the goal of PAI is not only to shape students who understand religious teachings cognitively, but also to internalize values in real life. Quranic values such as shidq (honesty), amanah (responsibility), iffah (honor), qana'ah (simplicity), and ta'awun (mutual assistance) are the foundation of noble morals that provide solutions to the moral problems faced by Generation Z (Ramayulis, 2018; Syafii, 2017). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) also encourages the development of religious habits such as congregational prayer, reading the Quran, and remembering God. These habits not only foster discipline but also foster spiritual awareness, which serves as an internal control for adolescents in facing the temptations of the digital world (Suyanto, 2013). Thus, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) serves as a "moral fortress" that serves as a filter for Generation Z, enabling them to wisely manage their freedom of information.

The concept of mujahadah al-nafs (self-control) taught in Islam is also highly relevant. Self-control is crucial for the digital generation, which is vulnerable to gadget addiction, online pornography, and other impulsive behaviors (Husaini, 2015). Through this spiritual approach, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) provides moral therapy in the form of strengthening self-awareness, controlling desires, and Islamic time management.

Fourth, the Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers as Moral Role Models and Educational Innovators. Islamic Religious Education teachers are central figures in character education. In Islamic tradition, teachers are role models who teach values not only through words but also through everyday behavior. Generation Z tends to value the authenticity and exemplary behavior of teachers, not just verbalization. Therefore, teachers' consistency in morals, communication, emotional management, and behavior will significantly influence students' moral attachment (Sari, 2021; Kurniawan, 2020). More than just role models, Islamic Religious Education teachers are also expected to be educational innovators. Generation Z demands learning that is creative, interactive, and relevant to their world. Traditional lecturing methods are no longer entirely adequate. Instead,

approaches such as role-play, moral debate, case studies, and problem-based learning provide space for students to critically analyze real-world phenomena (Salam, 2022).

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are now also required to possess digital literacy. They need to present Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning through media that resonates with students, such as infographics, short videos, podcasts, digital comics, and e-learning platforms (Ariyanto, 2021). When teachers are able to integrate Islamic values with technology, PAI will no longer be considered an outdated subject, but rather an adaptive and relevant one.

Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education teachers act as mediators, connecting Islamic teachings with social realities. For example, when discussing digital ethics, teachers can relate the prohibition on backbiting, guarding the tongue (hifz al-lisan), or the value of checking one's judgment before spreading information. This contextual approach helps students feel that Islamic values are alive and relevant to their daily lives.

Fifth, Transformation of Digital Media as a Means of Educational Preaching.

Digital media is now not only a means of entertainment for Generation Z, but also a space for character development. Unfortunately, this space is often dominated by negative content such as pornography, violence, hate speech, and hedonistic behavior (Pratiwi, 2020). This is where Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic opportunity to penetrate the digital space as an informative and educational medium for preaching.

Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are highly effective for conveying Islamic values through short visual content. Several young Islamic preachers and religious teachers have demonstrated that digital preaching can capture the attention of Generation Z when presented in an engaging, creative, and light-hearted manner (Nuryanto, 2022). Examples include Islamic motivational content, tips on daily morals, short videos on etiquette, and explanations of Quranic verses in a storytelling format.



In addition to social media, digital applications such as mobile Qurans, e-books, daily prayer apps, and online Islamic Religious Education (PAI) classes provide new opportunities for students to learn religion independently (Wulandari, 2020). By utilizing technology, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is not only present in the classroom but also follows the lifestyle of Generation Z. This digital transformation also serves as a countermeasure against negative content. When the digital space is filled with quality Islamic content, Generation Z gains positive alternatives that can shape more moral mindsets and behaviors.

Sixth, Collaboration between Schools, Families, and Communities in Strengthening the Morals of Generation Z.

The process of internalizing values cannot rely solely on schools. The family, as the first and primary educator, has a significant influence on the formation of a child's character (Ridwan, 2022). Islamic parenting practices such as instilling prayer, reciting the Quran, maintaining good manners, and communicating compassionately form the foundation for developing noble morals. If families instill these values from an early age, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools will more easily reinforce them.

The community also plays a crucial role. Positive social environments such as mosques, religious study groups, youth activities, and Islamic spiritual activities can provide spaces for the implementation of values. Adolescents learn to interact, socialize, and develop empathy through these communal activities (Salam, 2022). While schools provide theory, families lay the foundation, communities provide spaces for practical practice.

The collaboration of these three pillars of education creates a mutually supportive moral ecosystem. When families are involved, schools are innovative, and the community is supportive, Islamic Religious Education values are more easily internalized consistently in the lives of Generation Z.



Seventh, the challenges of implementing Islamic Education in the Generation Z era.

Although Islamic Religious Education (PAI) holds a crucial position, its implementation is not without challenges. The first challenge is the persistent gap between the curriculum and social reality. Much PAI material is deemed less relevant to the life experiences of Generation Z, resulting in less meaningful learning (Zuhdi, 2019). The second challenge is teachers' limited digital technology skills. Many teachers struggle to develop innovative learning media, resulting in monotonous and uninteresting learning. The third challenge is the strong dominance of global culture. Social media rapidly introduces popular culture that often contradicts Islamic values, such as hedonism, unlimited freedom, and moral relativism (Pratiwi, 2020). Without strong moral education, Generation Z is easily influenced. To address these challenges, the following are needed: Renewal of the PAI curriculum to be more contextual, Digital literacy training for teachers, Strengthening the role of families in moral education, and Creating a religious and educational social environment. With these steps, PAI can function not only as a subject but as a social movement that brings about moral transformation among Generation Z.

Conclusion

Generation Z faces various moral challenges due to the rapid flow of globalization, advances in digital technology, and unlimited exposure to information. These conditions result in weakened self-control, diminished social ethics, increased individualism, and decreased sensitivity to religious values. In this situation, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role as a moral foundation that can guide students to understand, internalize, and practice Islamic values in their entirety. Through the integration of moral values into the curriculum, the instilling of positive behavior, and the exemplary behavior of teachers, PAI serves as a strategic instrument for shaping the character of a generation that is faithful, pious, and virtuous.



Furthermore, the success of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in strengthening the morals of Generation Z requires an approach that adapts to changing times. Utilizing digital media, strengthening the educational ecosystem through collaboration between schools, families, and the community, and innovating learning methods are crucial steps to ensure Islamic values remain relevant and easily understood by today's generation.

By strengthening the role and comprehensive implementation strategy of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Generation Z is expected to not only excel in technological capabilities and creativity, but also possess strong character, good ethics, and a commitment to Islamic values in everyday life.

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