



BUILDING THE CHARACTER OF GENERATION Z THROUGH DIGITAL LITERACY-BASED ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

Character development has become one of the primary concerns in contemporary education, particularly in response to the complex social and ethical challenges faced by Generation Z in the digital era. The widespread use of digital technologies has transformed the way young people access information, communicate, and construct their personal and religious identities, creating both opportunities and risks for character formation. This study aims to examine the role of digital literacy-based Islamic education in building the character of Generation Z and to identify effective strategies for its implementation in contemporary educational settings. This research employs a qualitative library research approach using content analysis of books, scholarly articles, policy documents, and previous studies related to Islamic education, digital literacy, and character education. The findings reveal that integrating digital literacy with Islamic educational values contributes significantly to developing critical thinking, ethical digital citizenship, responsibility, honesty, empathy, tolerance, and religious moderation among Generation Z. Islamic values such as *akhlaq* (moral character), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *hikmah* (wisdom), and *wasatiyyah* (moderation) provide a strong ethical foundation for responsible digital engagement while reinforcing students' moral and spiritual identities. Furthermore, effective implementation requires innovative learning strategies, the integration of digital technologies into Islamic education, and collaborative support from educators, families, and communities. The study concludes that digital literacy-based Islamic education offers a comprehensive and sustainable framework for strengthening Generation Z's character, enabling them to become morally responsible, digitally literate, and socially engaged citizens capable of responding to the challenges of the digital age.

Keywords: islamic education, digital literacy, character education, generation z, islamic values

Abstrak

Pembentukan karakter menjadi salah satu perhatian utama dalam dunia pendidikan kontemporer, terutama sebagai respons terhadap berbagai tantangan sosial dan etika yang dihadapi Generasi Z pada era digital. Pemanfaatan teknologi digital yang semakin luas telah mengubah cara generasi muda memperoleh informasi, berkomunikasi, serta membangun identitas pribadi dan keagamaannya, sehingga menghadirkan peluang sekaligus risiko terhadap perkembangan karakter. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran pendidikan Islam berbasis literasi digital dalam membangun karakter Generasi Z serta mengidentifikasi strategi implementasinya dalam konteks pendidikan masa kini. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian kepustakaan (*library*

research) melalui analisis isi terhadap berbagai buku, artikel ilmiah, dokumen kebijakan, dan hasil penelitian terdahulu yang berkaitan dengan pendidikan Islam, literasi digital, dan pendidikan karakter. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi literasi digital dengan nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam berkontribusi secara signifikan dalam membentuk kemampuan berpikir kritis, etika bermedia digital, tanggung jawab, kejujuran, empati, toleransi, serta sikap moderasi beragama pada Generasi Z. Nilai-nilai Islam seperti *akhlak*, *amanah*, *hikmah*, dan *wasatiyyah* menjadi landasan etis yang memperkuat perilaku digital yang bertanggung jawab sekaligus membangun identitas moral dan spiritual peserta didik. Selain itu, implementasi pendidikan Islam berbasis literasi digital memerlukan strategi pembelajaran yang inovatif, pemanfaatan media digital secara efektif, serta kolaborasi antara pendidik, keluarga, dan masyarakat. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendidikan Islam berbasis literasi digital merupakan pendekatan yang relevan dan berkelanjutan dalam membangun karakter Generasi Z sehingga mampu menjadi generasi yang berakhlak mulia, cakap dalam literasi digital, serta memiliki kepedulian sosial di tengah dinamika transformasi digital.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Islam, Literasi Digital, Pendidikan Karakter, Generasi Z, Nilai-Nilai Islam

A. Introduction

The advancement of information and communication technology has fundamentally transformed various aspects of human life, particularly in education, communication, and social interaction. Digital technology has enabled individuals to access information rapidly, collaborate across geographical boundaries, and participate actively in virtual communities. These developments have also reshaped learning environments, requiring educational institutions to prepare students with competencies that extend beyond academic knowledge, including digital literacy and ethical awareness (UNESCO, 2023).

Generation Z, commonly defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, is the first generation to grow up entirely within a digital environment. Their daily lives are closely connected to smartphones, social media, artificial intelligence, and online learning platforms. While digital technology provides opportunities for creativity, innovation, and lifelong learning, it also exposes young people to misinformation, cyberbullying, digital addiction, hate speech, and moral challenges that may influence their attitudes and behaviors (Prensky, 2001).

These realities indicate that technological advancement alone is insufficient to prepare young people for the complexities of modern society. Education should not only emphasize cognitive achievement but also promote character development that enables learners to become responsible, ethical, and socially engaged citizens. Character education has therefore become an essential component of twenty-first-century education because it cultivates honesty, responsibility, empathy, respect, and integrity among students (Lickona, 2013).

Within the Islamic educational tradition, character formation (*tarbiyah al-akhlaq*) occupies a central position. Islamic education aims to develop individuals who possess intellectual competence while maintaining strong moral and spiritual values based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The cultivation of values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *hikmah* (wisdom), *'adl* (justice), *ikhlas* (sincerity), and *wasatiyyah* (moderation) reflects the holistic objectives of Islamic education in preparing Muslims to contribute positively to society (Al-Attas, 1999).

In the digital era, digital literacy has become one of the essential competencies required for responsible participation in society. Digital literacy encompasses not only the technical ability to use digital technologies but also the capacity to access, evaluate, analyze, create, and communicate information critically and ethically. Individuals with strong digital literacy are better equipped to identify misinformation, protect their digital privacy, and engage responsibly in online interactions (Gilster, 1997).

The integration of digital literacy into Islamic education offers a comprehensive approach to character development. By combining technological competence with Islamic ethical values, students are encouraged to become critical users of digital media while maintaining moral responsibility in their online and offline activities. Such an approach enables learners to utilize digital technology as a means of acquiring knowledge, promoting social harmony, and strengthening their religious identity in contemporary society (Sahin, 2018).

Several previous studies have investigated digital literacy, Islamic education, and character education from different perspectives. However, most of these studies discuss these concepts independently, with limited attention given to their integration as a comprehensive educational framework for Generation Z. As a result, there remains a need for studies that examine how digital literacy-based Islamic education can simultaneously strengthen technological competence and moral character in response to the challenges of the digital age (Hasanah et al., 2023).

Based on this research gap, the present study aims to analyze the role of digital literacy-based Islamic education in building the character of Generation Z and to identify strategic approaches for its implementation in contemporary educational settings. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of Islamic education scholarship by offering an integrative framework that combines Islamic values with digital literacy to prepare morally

responsible, digitally competent, and socially engaged young Muslims for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

B. Theoretical Study

1. Islamic Education and Character Development

Islamic education is a comprehensive process aimed at developing individuals intellectually, spiritually, morally, and socially. It does not merely emphasize the transmission of knowledge but also seeks to cultivate righteous character (*akhlaq al-karimah*) based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The ultimate objective of Islamic education is to produce individuals who are capable of balancing worldly responsibilities with spiritual devotion while contributing positively to society. Therefore, character formation is regarded as the core mission of Islamic education, where values such as honesty, responsibility, justice, sincerity, discipline, and compassion are continuously nurtured throughout the educational process (Al-Attas, 1999).

Character development in Islamic education is closely associated with the concept of *tarbiyah*, which emphasizes gradual moral and spiritual growth. Unlike secular educational perspectives that often separate cognitive competence from ethical behavior, Islamic education integrates faith (*iman*), knowledge (*'ilm*), and action (*'amal*) into a unified educational framework. Consequently, successful Islamic education is reflected not only in students' academic achievement but also in their ability to demonstrate noble character in everyday life.

2. Digital Literacy in Contemporary Education

Digital literacy has become one of the most essential competencies required in twenty-first-century education. Initially understood as the ability to access and utilize digital technologies, the concept has evolved to include critical thinking, information evaluation, ethical communication, digital collaboration, and responsible participation in digital environments. Digital literacy enables learners to identify reliable information, recognize misinformation, produce digital content responsibly, and engage safely in online interactions (Gilster, 1997).

Educational institutions are therefore expected to integrate digital literacy into teaching and learning activities to prepare students for the demands of the digital society. Beyond technical competence, digital literacy also promotes critical awareness, creativity,

communication skills, and ethical decision-making, all of which are fundamental for responsible digital citizenship.

3. Generation Z and Digital Culture

Generation Z refers to individuals born during the digital revolution who have grown up with continuous access to the internet, smartphones, and social media. Their familiarity with digital technologies has significantly influenced their learning preferences, communication patterns, and social interactions. They generally prefer interactive learning environments, multimedia-based instruction, collaborative activities, and immediate access to information through digital platforms (Prensky, 2001).

Despite these advantages, Generation Z also faces various challenges, including excessive dependence on digital devices, declining face-to-face communication skills, exposure to misinformation, cyberbullying, online radicalization, and weakening moral awareness. These conditions require educational institutions to provide learning experiences that strengthen both digital competence and ethical responsibility.

4. Character Education from an Islamic Perspective

Character education occupies a central position within Islamic educational philosophy because moral excellence represents one of the principal objectives of Islamic teachings. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes virtues such as honesty (*sidq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), justice (*'adl*), patience (*sabr*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and wisdom (*hikmah*). These values provide the ethical foundation for individual behavior and social harmony. Accordingly, Islamic character education seeks to internalize these principles through continuous learning, exemplary conduct, habituation, and reflective practice (Sahin, 2018).

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also demonstrated character education through practical examples, making moral values tangible in everyday life. Consequently, Islamic education considers teachers not only as knowledge transmitters but also as moral role models whose attitudes and behaviors significantly influence students' character development.

5. Digital Literacy-Based Islamic Education

The integration of digital literacy into Islamic education represents a contemporary educational approach that combines technological competence with Islamic ethical values. This approach recognizes that students require not only digital skills but also moral guidance to navigate increasingly complex digital environments. Digital literacy-based Islamic education encourages learners to use technology responsibly while adhering to Islamic

principles of honesty, moderation, respect, accountability, and social responsibility (UNESCO, 2023).

Learning activities within this framework involve the utilization of digital media, online educational resources, interactive learning platforms, and collaborative digital projects that are guided by Islamic values. Such integration enables students to develop critical thinking, responsible digital citizenship, ethical communication, and religious awareness simultaneously. As a result, digital literacy-based Islamic education serves as an effective strategy for preparing Generation Z to become morally responsible, technologically competent, and socially engaged members of contemporary society.

6. Conceptual Framework

This study is based on the assumption that character development among Generation Z can be strengthened through the integration of Islamic educational values and digital literacy competencies. Islamic education provides moral and spiritual guidance, whereas digital literacy equips learners with the knowledge and skills required to participate responsibly in digital society. The interaction between these two dimensions is expected to foster ethical behavior, critical thinking, digital responsibility, and strong religious identity among students.

Accordingly, this study proposes that digital literacy-based Islamic education functions as an integrative educational model capable of responding to the challenges of the digital era while maintaining the fundamental objectives of Islamic education. This conceptual framework serves as the basis for analyzing how educational institutions can cultivate students who are intellectually capable, morally upright, and digitally responsible.

C. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach using a library research design to examine the role of digital literacy-based Islamic education in building the character of Generation Z. Library research was considered appropriate because the study focused on analyzing and synthesizing existing theories, concepts, and empirical findings rather than collecting primary data from the field (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data consisted of primary sources, including the Holy Qur'an, Hadith, and scholarly works on Islamic education, as well as secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and reports published by reputable national and international institutions. The literature was collected through systematic searches in academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google

Scholar, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink, using keywords related to Islamic education, digital literacy, character education, and Generation Z.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify key themes, compare theoretical perspectives, and synthesize relevant findings into a coherent conceptual framework (Krippendorff, 2019). The analysis focused on three main dimensions: the characteristics of Generation Z in the digital era, the integration of Islamic educational values with digital literacy, and strategies for strengthening character through digital literacy-based Islamic education. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from various academic publications and institutional reports, while theoretical triangulation was applied by integrating perspectives from Islamic education, character education, and digital literacy studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This methodological approach enabled the study to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relevance of digital literacy-based Islamic education in addressing contemporary educational challenges.

D. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the rapid development of digital technology has significantly influenced the character formation of Generation Z. As digital natives, this generation has grown up with unrestricted access to smartphones, social media, artificial intelligence, and various online learning platforms. These technological advancements have transformed the ways young people acquire knowledge, communicate, and interact with society. While digital technology offers opportunities for creativity, collaboration, and innovation, it also exposes young people to misinformation, cyberbullying, digital addiction, hate speech, online radicalization, and declining moral sensitivity. These conditions demonstrate that digital competence alone is insufficient to prepare Generation Z for the complexities of modern society. Instead, educational institutions must integrate moral and spiritual education with digital competencies to ensure that technological advancement contributes positively to students' personal development (Prensky, 2001).

The analysis further reveals that digital literacy should not be interpreted merely as the ability to operate digital devices or access online information. Rather, digital literacy encompasses critical thinking, information evaluation, ethical communication, digital citizenship, and responsible participation in virtual environments. Individuals with strong digital

literacy are capable of distinguishing credible information from misinformation, protecting their privacy, respecting digital ethics, and contributing constructively to online communities. These competencies have become increasingly important because today's digital ecosystem requires users to make rapid decisions regarding the accuracy, reliability, and ethical implications of information circulating through digital media. Therefore, digital literacy represents both a technical and a moral competence that supports responsible participation in the digital era (Gilster, 1997).

Within the perspective of Islamic education, the findings demonstrate that character development remains the primary objective of the educational process. Islamic education emphasizes the harmonious integration of intellectual development, spiritual awareness, and moral responsibility through the cultivation of values derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Values such as amanah (trustworthiness), sidq (honesty), hikmah (wisdom), 'adl (justice), ihsan (excellence), and wasatiyyah (moderation) serve as ethical foundations that guide Muslims in responding to social change. These values remain highly relevant in addressing contemporary digital challenges because they encourage learners to utilize technology responsibly while maintaining integrity, compassion, and accountability in both online and offline interactions (Al-Attas, 1999).

The integration of digital literacy with Islamic education provides a comprehensive educational framework capable of addressing the moral challenges faced by Generation Z. Rather than positioning technology as a value-neutral instrument, Islamic education encourages learners to understand that every form of digital engagement carries ethical consequences. Students are therefore expected to apply Islamic principles when creating digital content, communicating through social media, evaluating information, and participating in online communities. This integrative approach enables learners to become technologically competent without compromising their religious identity and moral values. Consequently, digital literacy-based Islamic education contributes not only to academic achievement but also to the development of ethical digital citizenship (Sahin, 2018).

The findings also highlight the strategic role of teachers in implementing digital literacy-based Islamic education. Teachers are no longer expected to function solely as transmitters of knowledge but also as facilitators, mentors, and moral role models who guide students in navigating increasingly complex digital environments. They are required to integrate Islamic values into digital learning activities through project-based learning, collaborative online

discussions, reflective assignments, and the utilization of educational technologies. By modeling ethical digital behavior and encouraging responsible online communication, teachers help students internalize Islamic values within their daily digital practices. Such instructional strategies create learning environments that simultaneously promote technological competence and character development (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Another important finding concerns the collaborative role of families, schools, and communities in strengthening the character of Generation Z. Character education cannot be achieved solely through formal classroom instruction because students spend a substantial amount of time interacting with digital media outside school. Parents play a fundamental role in supervising digital activities, establishing healthy technology habits, and reinforcing Islamic values within the family environment. Likewise, communities and religious institutions contribute by providing positive digital content, promoting ethical online engagement, and encouraging constructive social participation. This collaborative ecosystem creates consistency between educational values taught at school and those practiced in everyday life, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of character education (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that digital literacy-based Islamic education contributes significantly to the development of several essential twenty-first-century competencies. Students who receive integrated instruction are more likely to demonstrate critical thinking, creativity, communication skills, collaboration, problem-solving abilities, and ethical decision-making. These competencies are further strengthened by Islamic moral principles that encourage honesty, responsibility, empathy, tolerance, and social justice. As a result, learners are better prepared to respond to technological changes while maintaining strong ethical commitments and constructive social relationships. Such competencies are indispensable for preparing Generation Z to become responsible global citizens capable of contributing positively to both national and international communities (UNESCO, 2023).

The present findings also extend previous studies by demonstrating that digital literacy and Islamic education should not be viewed as separate educational domains. Earlier research has predominantly examined digital literacy from a technological perspective or Islamic education from a moral perspective. In contrast, this study proposes an integrative conceptual framework that combines technological competence with Islamic ethical values to strengthen students' character comprehensively. This integration responds to the educational demands of the digital era by ensuring that technological innovation is accompanied by moral responsibility and

spiritual awareness. Accordingly, digital literacy-based Islamic education represents a sustainable educational model that aligns with the objectives of twenty-first-century education while preserving the fundamental values of Islam (Hasanah et al., 2023).

Overall, the findings confirm that digital literacy-based Islamic education serves as an effective strategy for building the character of Generation Z amid the rapid transformation of digital society. The successful implementation of this educational approach requires curriculum innovation, teacher professional development, the integration of digital technologies into learning activities, continuous character assessment, and strong collaboration among educational stakeholders. By integrating Islamic values with digital literacy competencies, educational institutions can prepare students who are intellectually competent, morally responsible, digitally literate, and socially engaged. Therefore, digital literacy-based Islamic education should be regarded not merely as an educational innovation but as a strategic framework for developing a generation capable of responding wisely and ethically to the opportunities and challenges of the digital age (Krippendorff, 2019).

E. Conclusion and Suggestions

1. Conclusion

This study concludes that digital literacy-based Islamic education provides a comprehensive and relevant framework for building the character of Generation Z in the era of digital transformation. The integration of Islamic values with digital literacy competencies enables students not only to master digital technologies but also to develop ethical awareness, critical thinking, responsibility, honesty, empathy, tolerance, and moderation in their digital interactions. Islamic educational values such as *amanah*, *sidq*, *hikmah*, *'adl*, and *wasatiyyah* serve as fundamental moral principles that guide students in responding wisely to the opportunities and challenges presented by digital technology. Consequently, character education should not be separated from digital literacy; instead, both dimensions should be integrated into the educational process to foster balanced intellectual, moral, and spiritual development.

The findings further demonstrate that the successful implementation of digital literacy-based Islamic education depends on the collaborative roles of educational institutions, teachers, families, and communities. Teachers are expected to integrate Islamic values into digital learning activities through innovative pedagogical approaches, while parents and

communities should reinforce ethical digital behavior beyond the classroom. Furthermore, educational institutions need to develop curricula that combine technological competence with Islamic character education to prepare students for the demands of the twenty-first century. Such an integrative approach contributes not only to academic achievement but also to the formation of digitally literate, morally responsible, and socially engaged Muslim citizens.

2. Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed. First, educational institutions should integrate digital literacy systematically into the Islamic education curriculum by emphasizing ethical digital behavior alongside technological competence. Second, teachers should continuously improve their digital pedagogical skills and incorporate interactive learning strategies that promote both digital literacy and Islamic character values. Third, policymakers should formulate educational policies that support the implementation of digital literacy-based Islamic education through curriculum development, teacher training, and the provision of adequate digital learning resources. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct empirical studies using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approaches to examine the effectiveness of digital literacy-based Islamic education in different educational contexts and to explore its impact on students' character development across diverse cultural and institutional settings.

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