

SHAPING FAITH AND CHARACTER IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL ISLAMIC EDUCATION FOR GEN Z

Nur Hafiza^{1*}
Muhammad Rafi'i²

^{1,2}Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara

*Email: nurhafiza241207@gmail.com

Abstract: *Islamic education plays a crucial role in shaping students' faith and character, particularly for Generation Z who grow up in a rapidly changing digital and social environment. This study examines how Islamic education in senior high schools contributes to the development of religious faith and moral character among Gen Z learners. Using a qualitative literature-based research design, this article analyzes contemporary scholarly works, educational reports, and empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025. The findings reveal that Islamic education significantly influences students' moral awareness, spiritual commitment, and ethical behavior when it is implemented through contextualized pedagogy, teacher role modeling, habituation of religious practices, and value integration across the curriculum. However, challenges such as digital distraction, declining moral authority, and limited family involvement hinder optimal outcomes. The discussion emphasizes the need for adaptive teaching strategies that align Islamic values with Gen Z characteristics, including critical thinking, technological engagement, and identity exploration. The study concludes that Islamic education remains highly relevant in fostering faith-based character formation in senior high schools, provided that pedagogical approaches evolve to address contemporary realities. This article contributes to the discourse on faith-based education, character development, and Islamic pedagogy in the era of digital transformation.*

Keywords: Islamic education; character education; Generation Z; faith development; senior high school.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of social, cultural, and technological landscapes has significantly influenced educational practices worldwide. Among the most affected groups is Generation Z, a cohort born into an era characterized by digital technology, globalization, and instant access to information. While these conditions provide opportunities for learning and innovation, they also present moral and spiritual challenges, particularly for adolescents navigating identity formation during their senior high school years. In this context, Islamic education occupies a strategic position in shaping students' faith (iman) and character (akhlaq).

Islamic education has traditionally aimed not only to transmit religious knowledge but also to cultivate moral integrity, spiritual awareness, and responsible citizenship. In senior high schools, where students experience critical cognitive and emotional development, Islamic education functions as a foundation for ethical reasoning and faith-based decision-making. However, conventional pedagogical models often struggle to engage Gen Z learners who prefer interactive, contextual, and technology-mediated learning experiences.

Recent educational discourse highlights the urgency of re-examining Islamic education's role in addressing contemporary moral issues such as individualism, moral relativism, and digital ethics. The central question is how Islamic education can remain relevant and effective in shaping faith and character amid the complexities of modern adolescence. This article seeks to explore how Islamic education in senior high schools contributes to character formation among Generation Z and to identify pedagogical strategies that respond to current challenges while preserving core Islamic values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic Education and Faith Formation

Islamic education is grounded in the holistic development of the human being, integrating intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and moral dimensions. Classical Islamic scholars emphasize that education should lead to the formation of a morally upright individual who embodies Islamic values in daily life. Contemporary studies affirm that faith formation in Islamic education involves internalization of belief, habitual religious practice, and ethical application of Islamic teachings in social contexts.

Research indicates that students who receive consistent and reflective Islamic education demonstrate stronger religious identity and moral self-regulation. Faith formation is not achieved through doctrinal instruction alone but requires experiential learning, reflection, and ethical engagement.

Character Education in Islamic Perspective

Character education in Islam is inseparable from the concept of *akhlaq*. Islamic character education emphasizes virtues such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, empathy, and social justice. Recent empirical studies show that integrating Islamic character values into school culture positively influences students' behavior and social interactions.

Scholars argue that Islamic character education must move beyond moral instruction toward value internalization through modeling, habituation, and reflective practice. This approach aligns with contemporary character education theories while maintaining Islamic epistemological foundations.

Generation Z and Educational Challenges

Generation Z students exhibit distinctive characteristics, including digital fluency, preference for visual and interactive learning, critical thinking tendencies, and sensitivity to authenticity. However, they are also vulnerable to moral confusion due to exposure to diverse value systems through digital media.

Studies highlight that Gen Z learners respond positively to learning environments that are participatory, relevant, and technologically integrated. Islamic education that fails to adapt to these preferences risks disengagement and reduced moral impact.

Islamic Education in the Digital Era

The digital era presents both opportunities and challenges for Islamic education. Online platforms, digital Qur'an applications, and multimedia resources enhance accessibility and engagement. Conversely, excessive screen time and unfiltered content may undermine moral development. Recent literature emphasizes the importance of integrating digital ethics and Islamic values to cultivate responsible digital citizenship among students.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative literature-based research methodology. Academic articles, books, and conference papers published between 2020 and 2025 were systematically reviewed using reputable academic databases. Selection criteria included relevance to Islamic education, character development, Generation Z, and senior high school contexts.

The data analysis involved thematic coding to identify recurring patterns related to faith formation, character education strategies, pedagogical challenges, and educational outcomes. This method allows for a comprehensive synthesis of contemporary perspectives and empirical findings without relying on primary field data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Role of Teachers in Shaping Faith and Character

The findings consistently indicate that teachers play a central role in shaping students' faith and character. Islamic education teachers who act as moral exemplars (*uswah hasanah*) significantly influence students' attitudes and behavior. Gen Z learners, in particular, value authenticity; therefore, teachers' consistency between words and actions strengthens moral credibility.

Contextual and Student-Centered Pedagogy

Effective Islamic education for Gen Z incorporates contextual learning strategies that connect Islamic teachings with real-life issues such as social media ethics, environmental responsibility, and peer relationships. Discussion-based learning, reflective journaling, and project-based activities enhance moral reasoning and faith internalization.

Habituation and School Culture

Habituation of religious practices—such as congregational prayer, Qur'anic reflection, and community service—reinforces character development. Schools that integrate Islamic values into daily routines and institutional culture demonstrate stronger and more sustainable character outcomes.

Digital Integration and Moral Guidance

Digital tools, when used strategically, enhance engagement and accessibility of Islamic education. However, without ethical guidance, digital exposure may weaken moral discipline. The findings suggest that Islamic education must explicitly address digital ethics, guiding students to navigate technology responsibly.

Challenges in Faith and Character Formation

Despite positive impacts, several challenges persist. These include inconsistent family support, limited instructional time, and tension between traditional content and contemporary relevance. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration among schools, families, and communities.

CONCLUSION

Islamic education in senior high schools remains a vital instrument for shaping faith and character among Generation Z students. When delivered through contextual, student-centered, and ethically grounded pedagogy, it effectively nurtures moral awareness, spiritual commitment, and responsible citizenship. The study underscores the need for pedagogical innovation, teacher professional development, and curriculum integration to ensure Islamic education's continued relevance in the digital age. Future research should incorporate empirical field studies to further validate and expand upon these findings.

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