

THE ROLE OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN SHAPING THE PERSONALITY OF GENERATION Z STUDENTS

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Keyword

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Abstract

The digital era has given rise to Generation Z, a cohort characterized by high technological dependency, rapid information access, and a tendency toward individualism. These traits pose significant challenges in the development of student personality. This study aims to analyze the role of character education in shaping the personality of Generation Z students, to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation, and to evaluate the effectiveness of character education strategies applied in schools. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, using interviews, observations, and documentation as data collection techniques. The findings indicate that character education plays a vital role in fostering students' values of integrity, empathy, and social responsibility. Key supporting factors include teacher role modeling, a school culture of character, and parental involvement, while the main obstacles are the negative influence of social media, lack of environmental supervision, and limited digital infrastructure. Effective strategies identified include the habituation of character values in daily school life, reinforcement through extracurricular activities, and integration of the Pancasila Student Profile program. These findings affirm that contextual and sustainable character education can positively and adaptively shape the personality of Generation Z students in the face of rapid societal change.

INTRODUCTION

In an era of modernization filled with technological and information developments, generation Z—born between 1997 and 2012—experienced a transformation in values and mindsets that was very different from the previous generation. This generation grew up in a digital ecosystem that was very fast, instant, and often lacked meaningful social interaction. This had a significant impact on the formation of their character and personality, especially in terms of social responsibility, empathy, and behavioral ethics (Munawir et al., 2024). The phenomenon of student behavioral deviations such as bullying, low respect for teachers, and lack of motivation to learn are serious concerns for the world of Indonesian education. This is where character education comes in as a strategic answer to form a personality that is emotionally, morally, and spiritually balanced for generation Z students (Sunaryati et al., 2025).

Various previous studies have shown that character education has a crucial role in shaping the personality of students at various levels. For example, Zubaida (2024) emphasized the importance of the character profile of Pancasila students in building the values of mutual cooperation and integrity from an early age. Tarigan et al. (2025) proved that civic education can shape the character of a nation that is competitive in the digital era. Hasyim (2025) showed the role of Islamic religious education in strengthening the mental health and faith of generation Z students. Research by Sukarman et al. (2025) in elementary schools showed that student

character can be formed through a holistic approach based on local and national values. Likewise, Ningrum et al. (2025) highlighted the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as role models of moral character in the context of learning in schools.

Studies such as by Nadila (2025) highlight the importance of the etiquette of seeking knowledge as a character value in Islamic education. Sunaryati et al. (2025) revealed that character education can encourage students' creativity and innovation. Meanwhile, Nafi'ah et al. (2025) stated that instilling Islamic ethics plays a major role in shaping students' habits and behavior in everyday life. Several studies also highlight the relationship between character education and multicultural values (Asrori et al., 2025), learning independence (Putri & Ummah, 2024), and strengthening students' empathy in online learning (Zahro et al., 2025).

However, of the more than 30 studies analyzed, most of the research is still conceptual or focused on elementary education and religious approaches alone. There are not many studies that specifically investigate how character education plays a role in shaping the personality of generation Z students at the secondary level with a cross-disciplinary approach, combining technology, social, and student psychology. This gap creates space for deeper exploration of the dynamics of character formation of generation Z which is complex and influenced by the globalization of values.

The novelty of this study lies in the integrative approach that combines character education theory, personality development theory, and the perspective of generation Z in a digital context. This approach tries to understand how character education not only instills moral values, but also reconstructs students' personalities so that they are able to adapt, empathize, and be competitive amidst the onslaught of the digital era. This study also emphasizes a participatory approach from students, teachers, and parents as actors in forming character synergistically.

The main objective of this study is to analyze in depth the role of character education in shaping the personality of generation Z students in secondary schools. This study also aims to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of character education in the context of the digital generation. In addition, this study will evaluate the effectiveness of character education strategies implemented in schools in shaping students' values of integrity, empathy, and social responsibility.

The benefits of this research are divided into two aspects. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of educational administration science, especially in the context of character education policy design for the digital generation. Practically, this research is expected to be a guide for schools, teachers, and policy makers in designing character education programs that are adaptive to the needs and challenges of generation Z students. The results can be a reference for educational institutions in strengthening the role of character education as a foundation for developing human resources with integrity.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in depth how character education plays a role in shaping the personality of generation Z students. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate for understanding social phenomena naturally and contextually from the perspective of participants (Creswell, 2016). As done by Ningrum, Asrori, and Nur (2025), a qualitative approach provides space to describe the reality of character education based on the experiences of teachers and students.

Types of research

This research is a case study, with the research location in a secondary education unit that has implemented an intensive character education program. This method is in line with that applied by Tarigan, Ginting, and Siregar (2025) in researching character education through digital citizenship. This study will examine in depth the practice of character education in the school environment and its impact on the formation of student personality.

Collection techniques

Data includes participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Interviews will be conducted with the principal, character education teachers, BK teachers, and students in grades VIII and IX. This technique was also used by Asrori et al. (2025) in identifying

character values through interactions between teachers and students. Observations were conducted in various school activities such as flag ceremonies, PPKn lessons, extracurricular activities, and Pancasila student profile strengthening projects, as the approach taken by Munawir, Ummah, and Putri (2024).

Research instruments

The research instruments were in the form of interview guidelines, observation guidelines, and documentation sheets. Data validity was tested using source and method triangulation techniques, in accordance with the approach taken by Nafi'ah, Zahro, and Azmi (2025). This triangulation technique aims to ensure consistency of information from various informants and different methods.

The data obtained will be analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model consisting of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This analysis allows researchers to find patterns of relationships between the character education process implemented in schools and changes in the personality of generation Z students. This technique was also used by Hasyim (2025) in examining the role of religious teachers and families on students' character and mentality.

The participant criteria were selected purposively, considering their active involvement in the implementation of character education. The selection of participants based on purposive sampling was also applied by Sunaryati et al. (2025) in a study on student character creativity and innovation. In this case, students involved in OSIS activities, Scouts, and character project strengthening will be key informants.

By using this method, this study aims to provide an accurate and in-depth picture of the character education strategies that successfully shape the personality of generation Z students in high school. This method is not only in accordance with the objectives of the study, but has also been used effectively in previous studies that discuss similar themes in the context of character education for the younger generation.

RESULTS

implements character education in the curriculum and school culture. The results of the study were obtained through in-depth interviews with the principal, BK teachers, character education teachers, and students in grades VIII and IX. Data were also collected through observations of school activities and documentation of the applied character education curriculum.

1. The Role of Character Education in Shaping the Personality of Generation Z Students

Interview data shows that character education has a significant influence on the formation of students' personalities. Values such as responsibility, discipline, and empathy begin to develop in students through daily activities such as morning assembly, group work, mentoring, and religious activities. Teachers said that students who initially showed individualistic behavior and lacked empathy began to show positive changes in attitude, such as caring for others and being active in school social activities.

Most students admitted that the character material delivered in PPKn and religion lessons, as well as the teacher's exemplary behavior, were factors that encouraged them to become more responsible and honest individuals. One student stated: "I used to like to postpone assignments, but now I feel guilty if I am not disciplined. I am more aware of responsibility."

2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Character Education

The main supporting factors for the implementation of character education in this school include: (1) high commitment of teachers and principals in forming a school culture based on values; (2) character strengthening programs through intracurricular and extracurricular activities; and (3) parental support in implementing character values at home. However, there are a number of obstacles faced. Teachers said that the negative influence of social media and digital content often weakens the internalization of character values that have been taught. In addition, not all parents actively accompany their children in implementing character values at

home. Some students also feel confused about distinguishing between the values taught at school and the contradictory reality of behavior in the outside environment.

3. Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Character Education Strategies

Strategies that are considered effective in forming students' character values include:

Instilling character values through routine activities such as class duty, morning literacy, and group prayer. Teachers' exemplary behavior, both in speaking and acting, which becomes a role model for students. Extracurricular activities such as OSIS and Scouts that build empathy and social responsibility. Pancasila Student Profile Project (P5) which integrates the values of mutual cooperation, independence, and tolerance.

Students showed improvements in social responsibility, honesty, and ability to work together. These results were reinforced by direct observations that students became more open in expressing opinions, resolving conflicts peacefully, and active in school social activities.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that character education has an important contribution in shaping the personality of Generation Z students who were born and raised in the digital era. Students experience a gradual process of internalizing values through a combination of direct teaching, habituation, and role models from teachers. This is in line with Lickona's theory (1992) which states that character education is effective if it includes three components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

These results support research by Zubaida (2024) and Tarigan et al. (2025) which emphasize the importance of strengthening the character of Pancasila students and citizenship values in shaping the identity of the younger generation. As in research by Sunaryati et al. (2025), creative and contextual strategies such as technology integration in value learning have been shown to increase students' absorption of character education.

The supporting and inhibiting factors found also strengthen the findings of Hasyim (2025) and Asrori et al. (2025) that character formation is not only influenced by school policies, but also by the quality of teacher-student relationships and parental involvement. Teacher role models have a central role in bridging values with students' daily realities.

Meanwhile, obstacles such as the influence of social media and permissive culture were also found in the studies of Zahro et al. (2025) and Munawir et al. (2024). These challenges indicate the need for a digital-humanistic approach, namely a character education strategy that is relevant to the lifestyle and way of thinking of generation Z.

The effectiveness of strategies such as habituation, role models, and P5 projects shows that a holistic and cross-curricular approach is the key to success. This finding supports the arguments of Sukarman et al. (2025) and Putri & Ummah (2024) that character education cannot stand alone, but must be part of an integrated educational ecosystem

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that character education has a very important role in shaping the personality of generation Z students at the secondary school level. Character education has been proven to be able to instill basic values such as integrity, empathy, and social responsibility which are the main foundations of students' personalities. These values are not only instilled through formal learning, but also through teacher role models, habits in daily school life, and student involvement in extracurricular activities and Pancasila student profile strengthening projects. The success of this character formation is greatly influenced by the synergy between the school environment, the active role of teachers, and parental involvement. However, this process still faces several challenges, such as the negative influence of social media, lack of supervision outside of school, and limitations in the use of technology to support digital character education.

As a recommendation, schools need to continue to develop integrated and sustainable character education programs, by utilizing digital technology wisely to reach the dynamic and fast-adaptive mindset of Generation Z. Teachers should be consistent role models in their

behavior and interactions with students, and be able to apply contextual, reflective, and life-relevant learning methods to students. Parents are expected to play an active role in assisting their children in implementing character values at home, while also monitoring the consumption of digital content that has the potential to conflict with moral values. On the other hand, the government and education policy makers need to strengthen regulations and infrastructure support that allow character education to be implemented effectively at all levels of education, including the preparation of a curriculum that is responsive to the challenges of the digital era.

Suggestions for further research are that similar studies be conducted with a broader approach, covering more locations and levels of education, and considering quantitative or mixed-method approaches to provide a more comprehensive picture. In addition, further research can be directed to explore the role of virtual environments, such as social media and online learning platforms, in supporting or hindering the character formation process. The study of the influence of local culture and school leadership style on strengthening student character is also an important topic that is worth developing.

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