

Character Education and the Challenges of Globalization: A Case Study on Generation Z Students

Niskaromah^{1*}, Sayida Khoiratun Nisak², Nachima Bakoh³, Eko Fabianto⁴

¹Institut Agama Islam Banten (IAIB) Serang, Indonesia

²Institut Islam Al Mujaddid Sabak (IIMS), Tanjung Jabung Timur, Indonesia

³Faculty of Education, Yala Rajabhat University, Thailand

⁴Institut Agama Islam Bakti Negara (IBN) Tegal, Indonesia

*Correspondent Author: niskaromahaman@gmail.com

Article Info:

Article history: Accepted, 10/08/2025, | Revision, 20/09/2025, | Published, 30/10/2025, | Vol (3), Issue (2), (Oct, 2025)
e-ISSN 2988-9973 | p-ISSN 2988-6724 | doi: <https://doi.org/10.61233/zijed.v3i2.31>

Abstract:

This study aims to describe the implementation of character education among Generation Z, analyze the challenges of globalization that influence their character development, and formulate strategies for strengthening character education in the digital era. As digital natives, Generation Z faces both opportunities and risks from the flow of technology, information, and global culture, which may weaken identity and local values if not balanced by strong character education. This research employed a qualitative descriptive case study approach. Primary data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, while secondary data were obtained from curriculum documents and related literature. Data were analyzed with triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure validity. The findings reveal four main points: schools have integrated character education into their curricula and activities, globalization and digital culture pose significant challenges, a gap exists between moral knowledge and students' actions, and strategies remain focused on religious and academic aspects with limited emphasis on local cultural values. The study concludes that character education for Generation Z requires innovative, contextual, and collaborative strategies that integrate technology, local values, and religious principles.

Keywords:

Character Education, Generation Z, Globalization, Digital Culture, and Educational Strategy.



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INTRODUCTION

Globalization has brought about major transformations in the world's social, cultural, economic, and educational order. In the field of education, the phenomenon of globalization is characterized by the rapid exchange of information, the advancement of digital technology, and increasingly intense cross-cultural interactions. This condition provides positive opportunities in the form of unlimited access to knowledge, the development of creativity, and the opening of global collaboration networks, but also raises serious challenges related to the identity, values, and morals of the younger generation (Umar et al., 2025; Wahab & Irpan, 2024). In Indonesia, this phenomenon can be seen in changes in the behavior of students who tend to be increasingly individualistic, consumptive, and dependent on digital technology, which has the potential to erode the value of cooperation and local culture (Herlina et al., 2024; Mumtaz et al., 2022). Generation Z, as a group born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is a generation that grew up in a digital and globalized

environment, making it vulnerable to shifting character values if not balanced with strong character education (Arizona et al., 2025; Nasrudin et al., 2024).

However, the implementation of character education in Indonesia still faces various gaps. Although national policies emphasize the importance of strengthening character education, practices in the field are often not fully effective. Generation Z learners often show academic success, but are still weak in terms of discipline, communication, ethics, and social responsibility (Arjaya et al., 2024; Kurniyati & Arwen, 2020). In addition, research shows that the influence of social media and digital technology often dominates learners' behavior, so schools face difficulties in shaping consistent character (Shinta et al., 2024). This academic and practical urgency demands an educational strategy that is able to answer the needs of the digital generation without sacrificing the noble values of the nation.

In a conceptual perspective, character education is based on moral development theory as proposed by Lickona, which emphasizes aspects of moral knowledge (moral knowing), moral feelings (moral feeling), and moral action (moral action). Bandura's social learning theory is also relevant because learners' behavior is influenced by the process of observation, imitation, and social interaction. In the context of globalization, value-based education theory emphasizes the importance of integrating local and religious values to strengthen the identity of the younger generation (Sukarno et al., 2021; Ardiansyah et al., 2023). Thus, this research positions character education as a filter and adaptive strategy to face the challenges of globalization, which is full of moral, social, and technological dynamics.

Based on this background, this research is directed at three main problem formulations: (1) how is the implementation of character education for Generation Z learners in schools, (2) what are the challenges of globalization that affect the character formation of Generation Z learners, and (3) what strategies can be done by schools to strengthen character education to be relevant to the era of globalization. The purpose of this study is to describe the implementation of character education in Generation Z, analyze the challenges of globalization that affect their character formation, and formulate strategies to strengthen character education in accordance with the needs of generations in the digital era.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in providing an empirical picture of how schools play a role in shaping the character of Generation Z in the midst of globalization, as well as offering strategies based on the Indonesian context that can enrich international literature. Some previous studies have mostly highlighted aspects of technology and media in the character building of Generation Z (Ariani et al., 2022; Poerwanti & Marmoah, 2021; Dewi & Mastoah, 2025; Syah et al., 2020), while aspects of the balance between local values, religion, and global demands have not been studied in depth (Fernández Espinosa & López González, 2024; Serdyukov, 2020; Hamidah et al., 2024). This research gap is filled by studies that not only relate character education to the challenges of globalization, but also contextualize it with real practices in Indonesian schools. By combining conceptual perspectives and empirical field data, this research seeks to strengthen the understanding of how character education strategies can be formulated in a more relevant, adaptive, and contributive manner to the global education literature (Iqbal et al., 2023; Lindo et al., 2025;

Surikova & Fernández González, 2022; Keraf et al., 2024; Yuherman et al., 2025).

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study strategy to examine the implementation of character education for Generation Z students in the context of globalization challenges. This approach was chosen because qualitative research is considered appropriate for exploring meanings, experiences, and social dynamics that cannot be fully revealed through quantitative methods (Lin et al., 2023). The research data consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, and Generation Z learners, direct observation of learning activities and school activities, and documentation of the character education program. Secondary data included curriculum documents, extracurricular activity reports, and academic literature related to character education and the challenges of globalization (Rohaenah et al., 2021). The data collection techniques used semi-structured interviews, observation sheets, and documentation studies as the main instruments, which allowed for inter-source triangulation to ensure data credibility (Adeeb et al., 2023).

Primary data inclusion criteria were participants who were directly involved in the implementation of character education in schools, namely, principals, teachers, and Generation Z learners. Exclusion criteria included individuals outside the school setting who did not have direct involvement in the character education program. The unit of analysis was the experience and practice of character education in the school environment. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis techniques that included the process of data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and preparation of narrative findings (Varpio & Artino, 2015). To increase validity, the study used source triangulation (principals, teachers, students) and technique triangulation (interviews, observations, documentation). The validity of the findings was maintained through member checking with respondents, while the reliability of the research was maintained by detailed recording of the entire research process (Robert & Sherman, 2005). This approach is in line with the principles of qualitative education research, which emphasizes an in-depth understanding of social phenomena through rich and interpretive contextual descriptions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this qualitative research are presented in the form of main themes obtained from the process of collecting and analyzing field data through interviews, observations, and documentation. The analysis was conducted using thematic coding techniques, resulting in four major themes that represent the implementation of character education, the challenges of globalization, character strengthening strategies, and the influence of digital culture on the behavior of Generation Z students.

Main Theme	Key Findings
Implementation of Character Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Character values are integrated into curriculum, habituation, and extracurricular activities. ○ Activities include religious routines (prayers, literacy, and clean-up programs). ○ Emphasis on cooperation and responsibility in group learning.
Globalization Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students exhibit digital dependency (frequent gadget use, reduced social interaction). ○ Low interest in local culture and traditional activities ○ Tendency toward boredom with conventional learning.
Limitations in Character Consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students find it difficult to maintain discipline, limit gadget use, and respect differing opinions. ○ The gap between knowledge and practice of moral values.
Strategies for Character Strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Integration of character values in lesson plans and tech-based extracurriculars (robotics, IT Club). ○ Decline in traditional cultural programs. ○ Focus on building religious, responsible, and socially aware students.
Islamic and Leadership Dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Emphasis on Islamic values (honesty, patience, religiosity) as moral foundations. ○ Charismatic leadership by principals and teachers reinforces role modeling in moral education.



Figure: Character Education and the Challenges of Globalization

The first theme is the implementation of character education in schools, which shows that schools have integrated character values into the curriculum, habituation, and extracurricular activities. The principal confirmed that the character education program is manifested in religious habituation, such as congregational prayers, morning literacy, and Friday clean-up activities, which support the values of religion, discipline, and environmental care. Teachers added that character values such as cooperation and responsibility are internalized in the learning process through group discussions and technology-based extracurricular activities. This is in line with research that emphasizes the importance of managing character education in schools with a combination of academic and non-academic programs to form quality graduates (Carter, 2020; Rohaenah et al., 2021).

The second theme was the challenge of globalization to Generation Z character building. Observations in the field show that some students are still late for school, interact more often through gadgets than face-to-face, and are less interested in local culture-based activities. This shows the

strong influence of digital culture in shaping students' behavior patterns. Teachers confirm that students tend to focus more on using their devices and are easily bored with monotonous learning methods. Other research also confirms that Generation Z is highly attached to digital technology, making them vulnerable to a decline in social interaction and traditional cultural values (Nasrudin et al., 2024; Mumtaz et al., 2022).

The third theme is the limitation of Generation Z learners' consistency in character education practices. Based on interviews, learners stated that maintaining discipline, reducing the use of gadgets, and respecting differences of opinion are the most difficult things to do. This shows a gap between academic knowledge and moral attitudes in daily practice. Previous studies emphasize that character education in Generation Z requires a creative and interactive approach that suits the characteristics of the digital native generation (Shinta et al., 2024; Syah et al., 2020).

The fourth theme is the strategy for strengthening character education at school. Based on documentation, character values are integrated in the lesson plans by emphasizing cooperation in discussions, while extracurricular activities are dominated by technology-based programs such as robotics and the IT Club. However, traditional cultural arts activities are less popular. The principal mentioned that the integration of character values in learning and school activities aims to build religious attitudes, responsibility, and social care. This strategy is in line with the literature that emphasizes the importance of a collaborative approach between family, school, and community in strengthening Generation Z character education (Keraf et al., 2024; Wahab & Irpan, 2024).

In addition, secondary data also show that character education from an Islamic perspective is one of the important approaches that can be used to strengthen Generation Z's religious and moral dimensions. Research emphasizes that values such as honesty, patience, and religious observance are relevant to protect this generation from the negative influence of globalization (Ardiansyah et al., 2023; Hamidah et al., 2024). Other studies have also highlighted the importance of charismatic leadership in schools to serve as role models in the implementation of character education, as exemplary teachers and school leaders have a significant effect on shaping learners' attitudes (Mahzumah et al., 2024). Thus, the results of this study show that Generation Z's character education is influenced by various contextual factors, including school policies, the influence of globalization, the dominance of technology, and patterns of social interaction in both school and community environments.

Discussion

The main findings of this study confirm that character education for Generation Z in Indonesia faces complex dynamics due to the rapid flow of globalization. Schools have attempted to integrate character values through the curriculum, religious habituation, and extracurricular activities, but these practices are often hampered by the influence of digital technology, social media, and declining interest in local cultural values. This result is in accordance with the problem formulation that highlights how the implementation of character education takes place, the challenges of globalization that affect it, and the strategies used to strengthen it (Jacobs & Haberlin, 2022; Kurniyati & Arwen, 2020).

Within the theoretical framework, the results of this study can be interpreted through Lickona's concepts of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, as well as Bandura's social learning theory that emphasizes the role of observation and imitation in character building. Generation Z learners show a gap between moral knowledge and real action, which is exacerbated by a digital culture that fosters an instant attitude. This is in line with research showing that Generation Z's character is formed in a digital environment full of moral and social challenges (Liou, 2022; Yuherman et al., 2025).

When compared to previous studies, the findings of this study are consistent with the results of research showing that globalization has an impact on the fading of the value of cooperation and increasing individualism among Generation Z (Murtadlo et al., 2024). However, other research emphasizes that local values such as the traditional art of in training can be used as a medium for revitalizing character education, thus providing an alternative, more optimistic point of view in the face of globalization (Mumtaz et al., 2022). This difference in findings emphasizes the need for adaptive and local context-based character education strategies.

The scientific contribution of this research is the presentation of an empirical picture that directly links the implementation of character education with the challenges of globalization in Indonesian schools, in contrast to previous studies that mostly review conceptual aspects alone. For example, research that emphasizes the role of Pancasila-based education as a solution to the moral crisis of the younger generation is more normative (Khoirina et al., 2022), while this study offers field findings on how school programs are actually implemented and faced with real obstacles, such as the dominance of gadgets, weak discipline, and low participation in cultural activities.

The limitations of this study need to be acknowledged, especially as the use of a qualitative approach with a case study at one research site may limit the generalizability of the results. In addition, the involvement of respondents was limited to principals, teachers, and some students, so the views of parents or external policy makers were not included. This is in contrast to other studies that combined a wider range of data sources, including national curriculum policy analysis (Firmansyah et al., 2021).

The interpretation of these results shows that character education cannot be separated from the leadership and example of teachers and principals. Previous research proves that charismatic leadership in educational institutions plays an important role in shaping the behavior of Generation Z students, because character values are more easily transferred through real examples (Mahzumah et al., 2024). This implication strengthens the relevance of social learning theory in the context of character education in the digital era.

In terms of methodological trends, this study emphasizes the importance of a descriptive qualitative approach to capture the in-depth experiences of students and teachers, something that is often missed in quantitative-based research. Recent literature also shows that the literature review approach is widely used to understand issues of globalization and character education, but often lacks the local dynamics in Indonesian schools (Herlina et al., 2024). Thus, this study adds an empirical perspective to the existing academic discussion.

The practical implication of this research is the need for curriculum innovation that balances the integration of local values and the utilization of digital technology. Other research has shown that the use of technological media can support character building through interactive learning experiences, as long as it remains directed at relevant moral and social values (Shinta et al., 2024). This is also in line with recommendations to involve the potential of local culture and the surrounding environment as a source of contextualized learning (Arista, 2020).

Finally, this research also makes a conceptual contribution in strengthening the idea of character education towards the Golden Indonesia 2045. Character education is seen as not only an instrument for instilling values but a national policy strategy that serves as a filter against the negative impacts of globalization (Ananda et al., 2019). This contribution complements the literature that emphasizes the importance of internalizing religious values and local culture from an early age (Fauziah et al., 2019), so that character education in the era of globalization can be seen as a comprehensive effort that is not only adaptive, but also transformative for Generation Z.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the implementation of character education for Generation Z learners in schools has been done through the integration of values in the curriculum, religious habituation, and extracurricular activities, but the practice still faces major challenges due to the influence of globalization and digital culture. Learners have difficulty maintaining discipline, moral consistency, and participation in local cultural value-based activities, while technology-based interactions tend to be more dominant. In addition, the strategy of strengthening character education applied by schools still emphasizes religious and academic aspects, so a more creative, contextual, and relevant approach is needed, with the characteristics of the digital native generation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of the literature on character education by emphasizing the direct link between the dynamics of globalization, digital technology, and character education practices in schools. Its practical contribution lies in providing an empirical picture of schools' efforts in instilling moral values in Generation Z, while highlighting the factors that hinder its effectiveness. Conceptually, this research confirms that character education not only functions as an instrument for instilling values but also as an adaptive and protective strategy in the face of the swift flow of globalization that has the potential to erode the nation's identity.

As an implication, future research needs to expand the scope of participants by involving parents, communities, and policy makers, so that the mapping of character education challenges can be more comprehensive. Educational practices also need to be directed towards innovations that combine digital technology with local and religious values, so that character education can more effectively shape young people who are not only academically superior, but also resilient, have integrity, and can contribute to nation-building in an increasingly competitive global era.

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