

THE URGENCY OF STRENGTHENING CHARACTER EDUCATION FOR GENERATION Z IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Ikamah Wati^{1*}, Shafira Nur Andini²

¹Pancasila and Citizenship Education Study Program, Pamulang University, Banten

*e-mail: ikmahwati1510@gmail.com

Abstract: *The rapid development of digitalization in everyday life is unavoidable. Character education plays a crucial role in shaping the identity and morality of Generation Z in the digital era. Generation Z is known as a generation that is savvy with digital technology. However, the fact is that digital technology advancements are fading and eroding the moral, ethical, and character values of Generation Z. Therefore, the urgency of strengthening character education for Generation Z in the digital era is crucial. The purpose of this study is to examine the dynamics of changes in character education for Generation Z in the digital era, analyze the opportunities and challenges of character education for Generation Z, and formulate appropriate strategies for implementing character education for Generation Z in the digital era. This study uses a qualitative approach that refers to literature studies. The research data sources refer to several scientific journals, both international and national journals, books, and trusted internet sources. The results of this study indicate that digitalization can provide opportunities and challenges in building the character of generation Z. Integration of character education through digital literacy is one of the right strategies in building moral values in generation Z. The recommendation from this study is that there is good cooperation between the government, educators, the younger generation, and the community in supporting the strengthening of character education for generation Z by utilizing digital technology.*

Keywords: *character education; digital era; generation Z*

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid flow of digitalization has now become an integral part of everyday life, especially among Generation Z. Information and communication technology has become increasingly sophisticated in the digital era. In the context of education, the use of digital technology has grown rapidly and is able to influence the educational sector (Qowim et al., 2024). The use of digital technology, internet access, and online learning applications or platforms can change the perspectives and interactions of each individual. However, this rapid digitalization also presents quite serious challenges such as moral and ethical challenges, the spread of fake news (hoaxes), online fraud, online harassment, cyberbullying, and data privacy violations that are common in the digital era. These various problems raise questions about how education can help address the moral challenges of the digital era.

According to Ki Hajar Dewantara (in Sulastrri et al., 2023), education is a lifelong demand for every child. Education is a means of perfection in order to promote good behavior and improve the life of each individual. Education can be said to be an effort to eradicate ignorance in humans, improve the standard of living, and build the dignity and honor of the nation. This is stated in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, which reads "To enlighten the life of the nation." The goal of the Indonesian state in this regard is that every citizen has the right to education. This is because education plays a central role in the development of the nation and state. The importance of education indicates that the development of the education sector is a primary factor in human resource development.

Character education is an important part in building good human resources. Character education aims to form a generation with noble character and morals, in order to create a peaceful, safe, and prosperous national life. The purpose of education in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system states that "National education functions to develop abilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to educate the life of the nation, aiming to develop the potential of students to become people who believe in and fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens." For this reason, strengthening character education is very necessary in the current digital era (Putri, 2018).

In today's digital era, character education plays a central role in shaping the morality of the younger generation, especially generation Z. Generation Z or commonly called the Zoomers generation is a generation that grew up side by side with digital technology. Generation Z tends to be accustomed to using the internet and the sophistication of digital technology. The development of digital technology that grows in generation Z can have positive and negative impacts for generation Z. Digital technology makes it easier for generation Z to establish social interactions without having to meet face to face, provides fast access to information, and can be a forum to hone the potential within generation Z. However, the negative impact of digital technology for generation Z is also very disturbing. Where many generation Z have lost their ethics and morals, many do cyberbullying, many are consumed by negative content (Jannah et al., 2024). These various problems are certainly very concerning for generation Z, therefore strengthening character education for generation Z in the digital era must be instilled from an early age.

Character education plays a central role in developing a Generation Z with noble character, intelligence, and the ability to use digital technology wisely and responsibly.

Referring to this, research by Triyanto (2020) states that the digital era can provide a positive space for character education. Character learning can promote the development of 21st-century skills. Thus, digital technology can be a platform for character building through online learning. Furthermore, research by Wulansari (2021) shows that a character education approach can be implemented through digital lifestyle patterns. Character education patterns in the digital era can facilitate character formation in elementary school students.

Based on the explanation above, it can be understood that character education is an important part of national and state life. The many problems of character education in the digital era must be faced immediately. Therefore, strengthening character education for generation Z is very necessary to build a generation Z that is morally, intellectually, ethically intelligent, and able to be responsible in using digital technology. This research was conducted to examine: (1) how are the dynamics of character education for generation Z in the digital era?; (2) what are the challenges and opportunities for character education in the digital era?; (3) How is the integration of character education and digital technology for generation Z?. This research focuses on understanding the dynamics of character education in the digital era, the challenges and opportunities of character education in the digital era, and the integration of character education and digital technology for generation Z. Thus, this research is expected to provide a real contribution in realizing the strengthening of character education for generation Z in the digital era.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach, drawing on literature studies (library research). Qualitative methods can help describe phenomena occurring in the current digital era related to character education for Generation Z. This study employed a descriptive data analysis approach, which will ultimately uncover the meaning of the research (Adlini et al., 2022). Data sources in this study included various journals relevant to the research, both international and national, related books, articles, reliable internet sources, and other materials relevant to the research topic. This study employed content analysis techniques to examine and interpret various relevant literature sources. Data were analyzed through data reduction, theme categorization, and conclusion drawing based on their relevance to the digital era. Literature selection criteria included relevance to the research topic, source credibility, year of publication, and direct relevance to strengthening character education, challenges and opportunities, and the integration of character education with digital technology through digital literacy. Validation was conducted through source triangulation by comparing findings from various scientific journals and observing current phenomena. With these procedures, the results of this study are expected to provide a tangible contribution to strengthening character education for Generation Z in the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Dynamics of Character Education for Generation Z in the Digital Era

Character education is currently at a point of significant change due to the influence of digitalization. Generation Z is a group born and raised amidst the rapid development of technology and widespread digitalization. From an early age, they have become accustomed to digital technologies such as electronic devices, the internet, and

social media, making these technologies an integral part of their daily lives. This technology allows them to gain rapid access to information, develop high adaptability, and develop different learning patterns than previous generations. However, behind this convenience, challenges arise in character development. The instant culture and individualistic nature that thrive in the digital space often displace values such as honesty, empathy, and cooperation, necessitating character education to maintain a balance between technological advancement and moral strengthening (Keban & Yosep, 2022).

Strengthening the values of integrity, religiosity, and mutual cooperation in Generation Z is crucial, particularly through digital literacy-based education. Digital literacy extends beyond device operating skills to critical thinking skills regarding the content consumed and its impact on behavior. With good digital literacy, Generation Z is able to filter useful information, avoid negative content, and utilize technology for productive purposes. Furthermore, digital literacy can be a means to instill values of togetherness and social responsibility that align with the nation's culture (Rahman et al., 2023).

Digital literacy should be understood more holistically, not just from a technical perspective. In online interactions, Generation Z needs to understand digital ethics such as maintaining privacy, respecting other users, and avoiding the spread of false information. Responsibility is crucial because every activity in the digital world has an impact, both on oneself and others. Furthermore, critical thinking skills are a key asset for filtering the flood of information, enabling this generation to distinguish between valid and misleading information. Education that integrates these values will produce a generation that is not only technologically savvy but also possesses good character (Yuniarto & Yudha, 2021).

The gap between technological mastery and moral readiness among Generation Z is increasingly apparent amidst the rapid flow of digitalization. Many of them are highly adept at using technology, but lack a deep understanding of the ethics of its wise use. Phenomena such as cyberbullying, the spread of false information, hate speech, and consumerist behavior are indications of a weak awareness of digital ethics. Nurhabibah (2025) highlights that low self-control in technology use can erode moral values. Excessive gadget use can reduce empathy and social interaction skills. Unequal digital literacy makes it difficult for many students to critically filter information (Panggabean et al., 2024). Therefore, digital literacy-based character education is crucial, with collaborative support from schools, families, and communities to guide the younger generation in using technology ethically and responsibly.

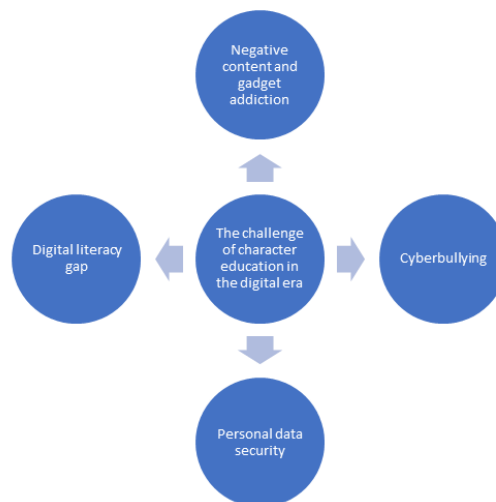
Innovative approaches such as project-based learning, gamification, and digital ethics simulations can help students internalize character values more effectively, as hands-on experience in the digital space has a more profound impact than theoretical learning (Fadilah & Rabi'a, 2021). Social media can be a relevant character education tool for Generation Z, given their high level of interaction on digital platforms, which can be utilized to convey moral messages and reinforce the values of mutual cooperation, integrity, and responsibility (Setyastuti, 2024).

Character education for Generation Z requires an approach that is adaptive and relevant to the technological developments they face. Digital literacy is not only a means of mastering technology but also a crucial instrument for developing ethical awareness and social responsibility (Liska et al., 2021). By integrating moral values into digital

learning, Generation Z can be shaped into competent, empathetic individuals who are ready to face the challenges of the globalization era (Jannah et al., 2024). This success certainly requires collaboration between schools, families, and communities to ensure sustainable character education (Tanjung et al., 2024). With the right strategy, Generation Z will grow into a generation ready to compete globally without losing their identity and moral values.

Challenges and Opportunities for Character Education in the Digital Era

Character education has a broader meaning than moral education because it not only distinguishes right from wrong but also instills habits of good conduct so that individuals develop awareness, understanding, a sense of responsibility, and the determination to instill good values in daily activities (Nugraha et al., 2023). In its implementation, character education faces various challenges such as the influence of negative content on social media, gadget addiction, cyberbullying, the digital literacy gap, and personal data security.



Picture 1. The challenge of character education in the digital era

Exposure to negative content on various digital platforms poses a major challenge to the character development of Generation Z. Social media often displays unfiltered information containing violence, hate speech, and values inconsistent with social norms. This ongoing exposure can weaken the moral foundation of Generation Z if not accompanied by adequate character education (Nurhabibah et al., 2025). Excessive use of technology can decrease empathy and diminish the quality of social interactions, while low digital literacy makes it difficult for many students to distinguish and filter beneficial and harmful information (Rukhmana et al., 2024).

In addition to exposure to negative content, excessive gadget use will diminish Generation Z's empathy and social interaction skills with their surroundings. Dependence on technology has led to a decrease in face-to-face interactions, weakening their ability to understand others' emotional expressions. This phenomenon also impacts the formation of social character traits, such as caring, tolerance, and cooperation. As the younger generation interacts more through screens, the risk of misunderstandings in communication increases. Character education can bridge the gap by encouraging a balance between technology use and direct social interaction (Panggabean et al., 2024).

Furthermore, cyberbullying is a serious challenge facing Generation Z in the

digital age. This form of bullying can include demeaning comments, unauthorized distribution of content, and threats that impact the victim's mental health (Hilda Melani Purba et al., 2024). Cyberbullying cases are often difficult to detect because they occur in private spaces, making handling them even more complex. These cases risk lowering self-confidence, anxiety, and even long-term trauma for those who experience them. This emphasizes the importance of character education that instills empathy, tolerance, and social awareness so that Generation Z can behave wisely in the digital world and prevent the spread of these harmful behaviors (Rahman et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the digital literacy gap remains a major challenge in developing the character of Generation Z. Many students lack the ability to adequately sort information, leaving them vulnerable to hoaxes, propaganda, and misleading content (Sagala et al., 2024). This disparity occurs not only between schools in urban and rural areas, but also among students with differing levels of access to technology. As a result, the internalization of moral values through digital media is uneven (Nisa et al., 2023). Therefore, digital literacy-based character education needs to ensure equitable critical thinking skills so that every student can use technology healthily and responsibly.

Furthermore, personal data security and safety are issues that encompass protecting personal privacy, respecting the privacy of others, and detecting inappropriate online sites. Online data security is a significant challenge, as it determines the stability and smoothness of the system itself. Lack of knowledge and understanding regarding information and attention to personal data are significant issues. Therefore, training related to online personal data security is necessary to minimize the negative impacts (Fitri Barokah et al., 2024)

These challenges are further exacerbated by the rapid advancement of digital technology, which often outpaces the adaptability of traditional education systems. Social media platforms, recommendation algorithms, and viral culture create a dynamic yet risky environment, where Generation Z is often an early adopter of new technologies without adequate guidance, learning through trial and error (Hilda Melani Purba et al., 2024). This phenomenon demands the implementation of character education policies that are not only flexible and adaptive, but also responsive to technological changes, particularly through the strengthening of digital literacy, online ethics, and integrated character management (Meidinata et al., 2024).

Facing these challenges, character education cannot be a one-sided endeavor. Schools, families, and communities need to collaborate to build an ecosystem that supports the character development of Generation Z. Education that integrates digital literacy with the formation of moral values is key to ensuring this generation is not only proficient in using technology but also able to maintain ethics, empathy, and social responsibility amidst the rapid flow of digital information (Kusnadi, 2023).

While the digital era brings significant challenges, it also presents significant opportunities to strengthen Generation Z's character education. Digital technology can be an effective tool for instilling moral and social values through a more engaging and relevant approach. Digital literacy, Tantri (2023), emphasizes that it can serve as a bridge to strengthening character values, where students are taught not only how to use technology but also how to use it responsibly. With good digital literacy, Generation Z can develop critical awareness of the content they consume and utilize it for positive self-development.

Technology-based immersive learning is a prominent opportunity in character education. This method allows students to experience deeper learning through the use of interactive technologies such as simulations, virtual reality, or educational games. This approach not only increases student engagement but also encourages them to actively sort out positive information and internalize the values learned. In this way, character education can be packaged in an engaging manner that is relevant to the learning habits of Generation Z, who are closely connected to the digital world (Abdul Wahab & Ade Risna Sari, 2022).

Furthermore, the prophetic education approach implemented through marketplace activities in schools provides new opportunities to instill responsibility and creativity. Students' involvement in these activities encourages them to manage projects, work collaboratively in teams, and learn from real-life experiences (Fitri Aulia Rahman et al., 2023). These activities not only hone entrepreneurial skills but also foster the values of hard work, integrity, and responsibility. Through hands-on experience, character values can be instilled more effectively than theoretical learning.

The digital era also opens up space for strengthening the concept of critical digital citizenship. The development of moral knowing, modeling, feeling, and acting helps shape responsible digital citizens (Wati & Mardiana, 2025). This concept emphasizes that students not only know the right values but also emulate, experience, and practice them in their daily activities in the digital space. By understanding and applying these principles, Generation Z is expected to maintain their ethics and integrity even in a highly dynamic environment.

Furthermore, the use of digital technology in character education allows for personalized learning. Each student can be provided with materials tailored to their needs and interests, enabling more effective reinforcement of moral values. Data analysis technology and adaptive learning algorithms help teachers understand students' strengths and weaknesses, allowing individualized character education strategies. This approach can enhance learning effectiveness and ensure that character values are truly ingrained in students.

Utilizing various opportunities in the digital era allows for optimized character education to shape Generation Z, who are not only adept at utilizing technology but also possess strong moral and social integrity. Technology is now seen as a strategic partner in developing a generation ready to face the challenges of the times with strong character (Fitri Barokah et al., 2024). To achieve this, close collaboration between educators, policymakers, and the community is needed in designing an ecosystem.

An education system capable of effectively integrating technology to strengthen character values (Meidinata et al., 2024). With the support of digital literacy strategies, personalized adaptive learning, and active student participation, moral values can be instilled more deeply and sustainably (Putri, 2018).

Integrating Character Education Through Digital Technology

Character education is a process of instilling character values, encompassing knowledge, awareness, and actions to implement these values, both towards God Almighty, oneself, others, the environment, and the nation. Character development in Generation Z can help strengthen the life of the nation and state (Keban, Yosep, 2022). This character encompasses a combination of morals, ethics, and morality. Morals emphasize the quality of human actions, deeds, and behavior related to good and bad,

right and wrong. Conversely, ethics provide judgments about good and bad based on prevailing norms in a particular society. Therefore, character education refers to the instillation of moral and ethical values that will shape Generation Z's behavior in everyday life (Kezia, 2021).

In today's digital era, instilling character in Generation Z is crucial. Therefore, a strategy relevant to Generation Z's development in the digital era is needed. Strengthening character education in this digital era is part of the concept of digital citizenship (Wulansari et al., 2021). Within the concept of digital citizenship, there are nine elements that can be instilled in Generation Z to build good character and ethics in using digital technology. These nine elements are digital access, digital communication, digital skills, digital protection, digital ethics, digital rights and responsibilities, digital law, digital health, and digital commerce. The goal of the digital citizenship concept is to build, empower, and protect digital users, as well as to shape the responsibility of Generation Z in utilizing digital technology wisely and effectively (Wati & Mardiana, 2025).

Character education strategies through digital technology can be realized by implementing digital literacy in Generation Z. Furthermore, digital literacy can be defined as the ability or competency to operate a computer to write and read in digital formats. Therefore, digital literacy includes the ability to understand and interpret information in various formats such as video, images, text files, audio, and animation from various sources displayed through digital media.

Digital literacy is the skill of comprehending reading from various digital literature sources. Various technologies can be used to hone each individual's digital literacy skills. Improving character education through digital literacy is a strategy for facing the era of society. There are five basic character traits that can be applied in the digital era: nationalism, religiosity, independence, integrity, and mutual cooperation, which must be cultivated and developed systematically and effectively. The implementation of digital literacy must be carried out systematically, involving all relevant parties, such as schools, families, communities, and stakeholders (Fadilah & Rabi'a, 2021).

With this strategy, the integration of character education through digital technology can be achieved by understanding the concept of digital citizenship and cultivating digital literacy habits in Generation Z. By understanding the concept of digital citizenship, Generation Z can utilize digital technology wisely. Furthermore, digital literacy can build Generation Z's understanding of information or reading in digital literature from trusted sources. Therefore, the integration of character education through digital technology must be realized effectively and requires strong collaboration from various relevant parties.

CONCLUSION

Strengthening character education for Generation Z in the digital era can be realized through various stages, such as understanding the dynamics of character education, understanding the challenges and opportunities of character education in the digital era, and planning appropriate strategies to integrate character education through digital technology. Generation Z is one of the generations most vulnerable to the negative impacts of current digitalization. Therefore, strengthening character education must adapt to current developments. Generation Z must be able to utilize digital technology wisely

without diluting the moral values and character instilled in them.

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