



The Urgency of Strengthening Character Education For Generation Z In The Digital Era

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Abstract

Character education is increasingly important for Generation Z because digital technology shapes their learning, interaction, and moral decision-making. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of character education for Generation Z in the digital era, identify its challenges and opportunities, and formulate integration strategies through digital technology. The study used a qualitative descriptive approach based on library research. Data were collected from relevant books, scientific journal articles, and credible online sources published mainly within the last ten years. The sources were selected according to relevance, credibility, and connection with character education, digital literacy, and digital citizenship. The data were analyzed using content analysis through data reduction, thematic categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing, supported by source triangulation. The findings show that digitalization creates a dual condition: it expands access to character learning through digital platforms, but also exposes Generation Z to cyberbullying, hoaxes, gadget dependence, and weak digital ethics. Strengthening character education is therefore more effective when it integrates digital literacy, digital citizenship, family support, school programs, and community participation. The study implies that character education should not be separated from digital culture but must guide Generation Z to use technology ethically, critically, and responsibly.

Keyword: Character education; Digital citizenship; Digital era; Digital literacy; Generation Z

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1. Introduction

Generation Z has grown up in an environment where the internet, social media, mobile applications, and digital learning platforms have become part of everyday life. This generation is often described as technologically adaptive, fast in accessing information, and familiar with interactive communication patterns. However, the same digital environment also affects the way young people understand values, build social relationships, and make ethical decisions. In education, this condition makes character education increasingly urgent because students need not only cognitive competence but also the ability to behave responsibly in digital spaces (Keban, 2022; Zuhra, 2025).

Character education is aligned with the purpose of national education, which emphasizes the development of faith, noble character, knowledge, creativity, independence, democracy, and responsibility. In the digital era, these values must be strengthened because Generation Z faces moral risks that are different from those experienced by previous generations. The spread of hoaxes, hate speech, cyberbullying, data privacy violations, online fraud, and excessive gadget use indicate that technological mastery is not always accompanied by ethical maturity (Fitri et al., 2023; Panggabean et al., 2024; Rukhmana et al., 2024).

Several previous studies have emphasized that character education can be strengthened through digital literacy, digital learning activities, and the cultivation of online ethics. Wulansari et al. (2021) showed that digital-based character education can support character formation among elementary school students, while Yuniarto and Yudha (2021) explained that digital literacy contributes to strengthening character toward Society 5.0. Wahab et al. (2022) and Arifin (2024) also highlighted the importance of integrating character values into digital literacy-based learning. These findings confirm that digital technology is not only a source of risk but also a potential medium for strengthening moral values. Nevertheless, the existing literature still tends to discuss digital literacy, moral education, or the behavior of Generation Z separately. Limited attention has been

given to an integrated synthesis that connects the dynamics of character education, the challenges and opportunities of digital culture, and the practical strategies of digital citizenship for Generation Z. This article therefore supports previous research on digital literacy-based character education, while extending the discussion by positioning digital citizenship as a bridge between character values and responsible technology use.

The novelty of this article lies in its integrated conceptual mapping of character education for Generation Z in the digital era by linking moral values, digital literacy, online ethics, and digital citizenship. The purpose of this study is to analyze the dynamics of character education for Generation Z in the digital era, identify the challenges and opportunities of character education in digital culture, and formulate strategies for integrating character education through digital technology. The findings are expected to contribute to schools, families, communities, and policy makers in designing character education that is relevant to the digital habits of Generation Z.

2. Method

This study used a qualitative descriptive method with a library research design. The approach was chosen because the research problem focuses on understanding concepts, patterns, and meanings related to character education for Generation Z in the digital era. The study was conducted through a review of scientific literature relevant to character education, digital literacy, digital citizenship, and the moral challenges of digital culture. The review emphasized publications from the last ten years, with priority given to studies published between 2020 and 2025 so that the discussion remained aligned with recent developments in digital technology and Generation Z behavior.

The data sources consisted of national and international journal articles, books, legal and policy references, and credible online sources that directly discussed character education, Generation Z, digital ethics, digital citizenship, cyberbullying, gadget dependence, and the use of digital platforms in education. The literature was selected purposively based on four criteria: relevance to the research objectives, credibility of the publication source, recency of the discussion, and contribution to explaining the dynamics, challenges, opportunities, or integration strategies of character education in the digital era.

Data were analyzed using content analysis. The procedure began with reading and identifying key ideas from each source, followed by data reduction to remove information that was not directly related to the research focus. The relevant information was then categorized into themes, namely the dynamics of character education, digital-era challenges, opportunities for character strengthening, and integration strategies through digital literacy and digital citizenship. Interpretation was conducted by comparing findings across sources, while validity was strengthened through source triangulation by examining the consistency of arguments among journals, books, and credible references. These procedures enabled the study to present a conceptual synthesis that can be used as a basis for strengthening character education for Generation Z.

3. Results And Discussion

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

Character education is a learning process that aims to build and instill moral values, ethics and positive behavior in each individual. Character education focuses on forming good individual personalities and behavior in everyday life (Agus et al., 2023). According to Ainiyah in character education has important aspects, including; a) Development of universal moral values such as goodness, honesty and justice which are the basic foundations of human action; b) Building positive behavior and attitudes to encourage real practice in daily life; c) Character education introduces social ethics that are used for good social interactions such as respect for other people, joint collaboration, and a sense of responsibility; d) Character education helps individuals make wise decisions by looking at the situation and the right solution. According to Omeri (2015) states that character education has several main objectives as follows: 1) Form a quality personality; 2) Building social and ethical awareness and social empathy; 3) Improve the quality of individual life. Character education aims to develop quality personalities by creating individuals with integrity and good morals. This will shape individuals into good individuals who can contribute to nation building.

Generation Z is the generation born and raised in the digital era. Generation Z came after millennials, born between 2001 and 2010. Research by Zebra IQ (Zuhra, 2025) shows that Generation Z is highly adept at using digital technology from an early age. This widespread use of technology has shaped Generation Z's unique characteristics, such as digital natives, who cannot live without their smartphones. 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 (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). 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).

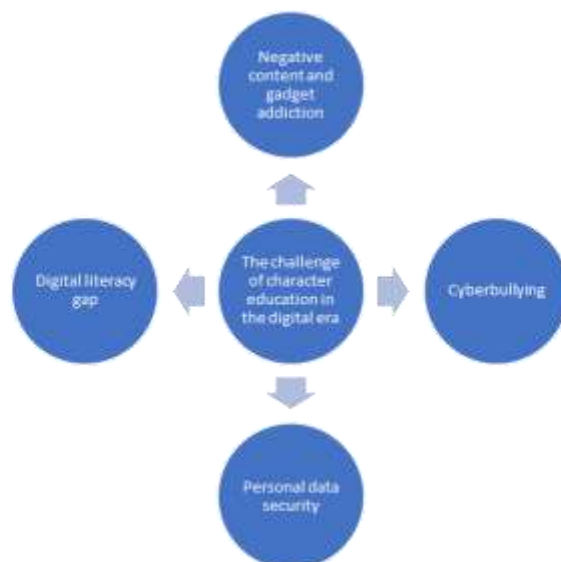
Innovative approaches such as project-based learning, gamification, and digital ethics simulations can help students internalize character values more effectively, as hands-on experience in the digital space has a more profound impact than theoretical learning (Fadilah & Rabi'a, 2021). Social media can 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., 2021). 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

In today's era of rapid digitalization, character education is a crucial element for Generation Z. As technology advances rapidly, it impacts everyday life, including how individuals interact, learn, and develop moral values, ethics, and personality. In this context, the urgency of character education in the digital era is not only a necessity, but also a pressing necessity to maintain a balance between technological developments and the inculcation of good moral values in each individual. Essentially, character education provides a strong foundation for individuals to navigate the digital era, enabling them to distinguish between hoaxes and negative content circulating on digital platforms (Arifin, 2024). Through character education, individuals, especially Generation Z, will be better able to filter information critically and intelligently, preventing them from being easily influenced by false information. Furthermore, the values of integrity, honesty, responsibility, and wisdom taught through character education play a crucial role in shaping individuals who are adept at using technology wisely and responsibly.

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, gadget addiction can lead to mental health issues. Generation Z often compares themselves through social media, which can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, or feelings of low self-esteem (Farid, 2023). Therefore, gadget addiction has become a serious problem for Generation Z in the digital age. Many Generation Z are inseparable from their gadgets. As a result, many Generation Z experience mental health issues, especially depression.

Furthermore, cyberbullying is a serious challenge facing Generation Z in the digital age. Cyberbullying often occurs on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. On social media, many individuals lack a grasp of digital ethics, leading to online bullying (Jannah & Pratiwi, 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 (Barokah et al., 2024).

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 (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 (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 (Wahyuningrum & Azizah, 2020). 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).

Generation Z is known as a creative and innovative generation. According to a survey conducted by Harris Poll (dalam Setyastuti, 2024), 63% of Generation Z are interested in utilizing digital technology as a means of creative activity. Generation Z frequently utilizes social media as a platform to share their ideas. This indicates that Generation Z is more adept at utilizing digital technology than previous generations. Therefore, digital technology can provide significant opportunities for Generation Z's advancement in the digital era. 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 (Wahab & Sari, 2022).

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. 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 (Barokah et al., 2024). 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 can be defined as a behavioral element that refers to physical factors that influence the human psyche. Character is often viewed from a psychological perspective. This encompasses aspects of behavior, manners, and the individual's ability to differentiate. According to Hill (dalam Noviani, 2023), character can determine a person's perspective and behavior. This character encompasses a person's moral values, attitudes, and behaviors related to all performance and social interactions in their environment. Therefore, character can be reflected in the habitus of everyday life. Meanwhile, according to Licona (1992), character can be assessed from three elements: moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions. These three elements can shape an individual's habit of thinking, feeling, and acting well towards others (Noviani, 2023).

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).

Strengthening character education is a crucial aspect of the holistic development of Generation Z in the digital era. In the era of rapid digital technological advancement, the integration of moral, ethical, and personality values is becoming increasingly important in the educational process. Character education not only builds intellectually intelligent individuals but also fosters empathy, integrity, honesty, and responsibility (Arifin, 2024). Therefore, strengthening character education must be integrated with digital technology. This integration of character education with digital technology can be achieved through digital literacy and the concept of digital citizenship.

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 (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 key to understanding how individuals can use digital technology wisely. Digital literacy is defined as the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, evaluate, and create information through digital technology wisely and responsibly (Yulastri & Ramadhon, 2025). Gilster in states that digital literacy is not just technical skills, but the ability to understand and use information from various sources accessed through digital technology. In the era of social media, digital literacy includes critical consumption of digital content, online collaboration, and digital identity awareness (Otta & Ramadhania, 2025). 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.

4. 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. In this study, the dynamics of character education development in the digital era are very significant where character education can be implemented by utilizing digital technology such as interactive learning processes through digital platforms. The digital era also presents challenges and opportunities in the implementation of character education for Generation Z. Challenges such as cyberbullying, data security, Generation Z mental health, dependence on digital devices, and many more are issues that must be addressed immediately and wisely. On the other hand, digitalization also provides opportunities for strengthening character education such as the ease of the character education learning process that can be done through online learning platforms. Thus, in the context of strengthening character education, an appropriate strategy is needed to integrate character education with digital technology. This can be done through a good understanding of the concept of digital citizenship and digital literacy.

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