Examining the Characteristics of Generation Z and Their Implications for Students' Character Education

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Abstract:

This study examines the characteristics of Generation Z as digital natives along with their implications for character education. This study is important to carry out considering that each generation has its own characteristics that distinguish it from other generations, especially in the education process. The research method used in this study is a literature study with the stages of reviewing, collecting, and analyzing these references. The results of this study indicate that Generation Z has a variety of uniqueness compared to other generations. The most prominent uniqueness of this generation is their ability and habits in using technology. In addition, this generation is also known as a generation that is more creative and innovative, has social responsibility, is active, likes to seek comfort, prioritizes security, is easy to connect with each other, and other characteristics. The uniqueness of Generation Z brings changes to various aspects of life, including the character education process. The character education process is considered still very necessary for this generation. Character education for this generation can be carried out through the family environment, school environment, and community environment. Character education in the family environment emphasizes more on the use of good approaches and the creation of a harmonious family environment. Meanwhile, education in the school environment for Generation Z can be implemented by choosing a variety of strategies, approaches, and learning models that are right for this generation. As for character education through the current community environment, it can be done by creating religious character posts that are uploaded to the internet via social media. This study recommends that subsequent researchers conduct character education experiments in the school, family, or community environment.

Contribution: By identifying the characteristics of Generation Z, the research highlights the need for educational approaches that cater to their specific needs. This includes adapting teaching methods to incorporate technology and interactive learning experiences that resonate with their digital upbringing.

Keywords: digital technology; noble character; religious education; school environment.

INTRODUCTION

The character education agenda for students is one of the government's current concerns. Government policies that encourage the creation of students with character have been implemented since 2010 (Nasrudin & Fakhruddin, 2023). Character development is important, considering that character functions as the foundation for the development of a nation's society (Nasrudin & Fakhruddin, 2023). Given the importance of this, the Indonesian government has emphasized strengthening character education through the policy of Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (Permendikbud) Number 20 of 2018 concerning Strengthening Character Education in Formal Education. Apart from that, the Government, through the existence of an independent curriculum, has emphasized aspects of character development with the content of the Pancasila student profile (Subiyantoro et al., 2023). Thus, the government has taken various steps and policies to create students who have noble character.

Unfortunately, current societal phenomena show unsatisfactory results of character education. Several education observers believe that the quality of character education is decreasing. One indicator of the decline in character education is marked by the decline in people's attitudes and behavior, which increasingly do not show conformity with the desired value order (Marzuki & Hapsari, 2015). We can see this view in the real world every day. We still often encounter various types of irregularities, such as brawls between students, narcotics abuse, theft, indiscipline, impoliteness, intimidation and intolerance in the news about daily life (Zulela et al., 2022). Various acts of character deviation are recognized by various studies as indicators of a moral crisis occurring in society and therefore need to be addressed as quickly as possible (Nasrudin & Fakhruddin, 2024). Based on this, it can be seen that strengthening religious character education is important to apply to the current young generation as students so that they can live in society well in the future.

Strengthening character education should be carried out for each generation. Unfortunately, current research still focuses on strengthening character education for the millennial generation, and there is still a lack of discussion regarding strengthening character education for Generation Z. Noviani's research (Noviani, 2023) examines the urgency of character education for millennial teenagers in the era of society. Putri, Nurantika, & Maulia (Putri et al., 2023)) in their research examined the importance of character education in the millennial generation in the digital era. Herzawati (Herzawati, 2022) her research examines the importance of religious education in building the character of the millennial generation in the era of globalization. Based on the variety of research above, it can be seen that previous research still discusses strengthening character education for the millennial generation.

Different from the various studies above, this research examines strengthening character education for generation Z. This research shows how the characteristics of generation Z's learning styles are accompanied by their implications for programs to strengthen character education. This research is important because each generation has different characteristics from the previous generation. A good understanding of the characteristics of each generation will enable more optimal learning goals to be achieved (Budiman & Franky, 2021). The results of this research will explain the characteristics of generation Z along with how to strengthen character education for this generation. It is hoped that the results of this research can later be put into practice and implemented by educators or education policymakers in the school environment or by parents in the home environment.

METHOD

This research uses a literature study research method. This research process was carried out by reviewing various books, literature, journals, notes and other information related to Generation Z and character education. The stages of literature study in this research include several steps, namely reviewing references, collecting references, and analyzing these references (Nasrudin et al., 2023). The types of references in this research consist of primary references and secondary references. The primary reference in this research uses various Scopus-indexed articles to understand the characteristics of Generation Z and understand character education. The secondary references in this research were obtained from various relevant journals. The character education theory in this research serves as an implication for adapting to the characteristics of Generation Z using the views of Thomas Lickona. Lickona (1996) in his research stated that there are at least three parties who can provide character education, including the school environment, family and community environment. The flow of this research itself can be seen as follows:
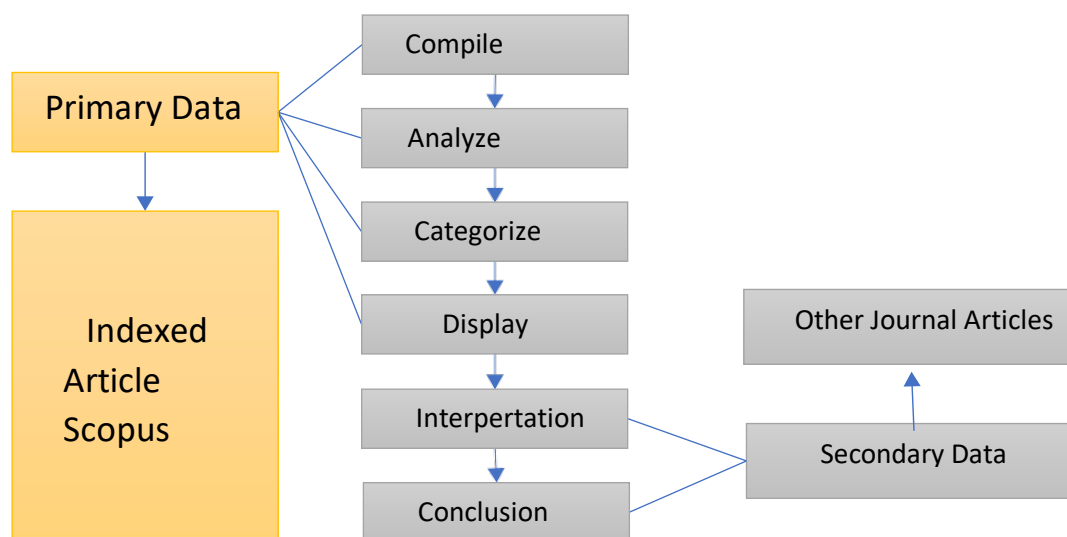
Figure 1. Research Flow

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character education is currently one of the fundamental pillars of education in Indonesia. This is because the noble character is one of the goals of national education in Indonesia. Law of the Republic of Indonesia number 20 of 2003 explicitly states that national education aims to develop the potential of students to become human beings who believe and are devoted to God Almighty, have a noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become citizens. democratic and responsible country. These national education goals are the goals of all subjects in schools. All subjects in schools must be directed towards achieving national education goals. Apart from that, the government has also stipulated character education in various existing regulations. The implementation of character education programs has been regulated in presidential regulation (Perpres) number 87 of 2017 concerning strengthening character education (PPK). In this regulation, the implementation of strengthening character education is carried out with the aim of strengthening the values of tolerance, honesty, religion, discipline, love of peace, hard work, social care, creativity, love of reading, independence, national spirit, democracy, respect for achievement, curiosity, love. homeland, communicative, responsible and environmentally conscious (Maisyaroh et al., 2023). Policies regarding character education are also contained in Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 20 of 2018 concerning strengthening character education. This regulation is often used as a reference for the implementation of strengthening character education in various schools. Based on the description above, it can be seen that the Indonesian government has regulated policies regarding strengthening character education in various existing regulations.

The integration of strengthening character education in the educational environment is a very important aspect. The existence of positive character in each individual will encourage that individual to be able to set good goals, have good life values, and have good ethical principles. All of these components will guide each individual to live their daily life well. Individuals who live a life with good character will gain high trust, stable relationships, optimal performance, respect, and positive social perceptions (Sartika et al., 2024). Apart from that, society needs to rebuild the nation's character which is increasingly eroded by time. It is feared that the challenges of current developments will increasingly eliminate concern for others, tolerance and other positive attitudes (Maisyaroh et al., 2023). The development of positive traits and attitudes in each individual student will, of course, encourage the creation of an effective social environment. This is because the more individuals who have positive characters, the more interactions built by each individual will be positive. Every individual with this positive character will later be able to fulfill his or her rights and responsibilities and realize prosperity and the common good in the social environment (Effendi, 2023). Thus, it can be seen that character education is an important activity to create a better societal environment.

The importance of good character has been explained in Islamic teachings. Islamic teachings in the Quran and hadiths have emphasized the importance of positive character. Some verses of the Quran that emphasize

character education include Q.S. Al-Qalam verse 4, Q.S. Al-Ahzab verse 21, Q.S. An-Nahl verse 90, and Q.S. Al-Isra Verse 23. Allah SWT in Q.S. Al-Ahzab verse 21 says:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِيْ رَسُوْلِ اللهِ اُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْاٰخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللهَ كَثِيْرًاۗ

Indeed, in (the) Messenger of Allah, there really is a good role model for you, (namely) for those who hope for (the mercy of) Allah and (the coming of) the Day of Judgment and who remember Allah a lot (Al-Ahzab/ 33:21).

This verse shows the importance of having good deeds like Rasulullah SAW. Rasulullah SAW himself was an example for all humans. The Prophet always taught noble character and set an example for his people (Solihin et al., 2023). Apart from the Koran, Islamic teachings also emphasize the importance of character education in the hadith. The importance of character education can be seen in the hadith in the book of Tirmidhi number 1870 as follows:

وَقَالَ عَلَيْهِ الصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ: أَكْرِمُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ وَأَحْسِنُوا آدَابَهُمْ

"The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, 'Honor your children and improve their manners'" (HR At-Tirmidhi).

Hadith or sunnah is one of the sources of Islamic teachings that has an important position. Hadith can function as bayan or an explanation of the verses of the Koran. The above hadith was narrated by Imam at-Tirmidhi from Jabir ibn Samura and the hadith is Hasan (Nuhdi, 2018). The content of the hadith above emphasizes the urgency of ethical education for a child. The importance of educating a child's manners based on this hadith is more important than giving charity with one sha (Setiyawan, 2015). Thus, it can be concluded that a noble character is an important part that every Muslim must have.

Aspects of education, including character education, cannot be separated from the characteristics of each generation in the development of the times. Education needs to understand the characteristics of each generation in the development of the times so that it can be implemented optimally (Budiman & Franky, 2021). Teachers need to have interaction skills and know the learning preferences of each generation in order to be able to encourage and develop the abilities of that generation's students. Without an understanding of the characteristics of students, the educational process will not be able to develop student's learning abilities (Reyes et al., 2020). Times that continue to experience changes cause differences in human behavior and behavior. Education, in this case, needs to equip the nation's next generation to face future developments. Education should be implemented with the aim that each individual is able to identify various solutions to problems in the future (Salsabila et al., 2020). Thus, it can be seen that education needs to adapt to the unique characteristics of each generation in the development of the times so that it can run optimally and equip students to overcome various problems in the future.

A generation is a group of people who share a birth year, age range, and significant life events (Tkalac Verčič & Verčič, 2024). Certain generations can be identified based on year of birth, age, and events that frequently occur in their life and development processes (Lifintsev et al., 2019). Differences in developments over time and social events experienced by each generation differentiate one generation from another. Experience with special events that previous generations did not have will encourage new generations to have different values, attitudes, preferences and behavior (Otegui Carles et al., 2023). These differences between generations are prone to conflict if there is no right approach and without good understanding between one generation and another. Currently, there are six contemporary generations in the world, including the silent generation, baby boomers, generation X, generation Y (millennials), and Generation Z (Tkalac Verčič & Verčič, 2024).

Current developments have ushered in Generation Z as students. Generation Z is the generation born after Generation Y, often known as the millennial generation. This generation was born amidst the process of globalization, digitalization and cultural diversity. The internet and new technologies have greatly influenced various aspects of their lives. This causes the norms and behavioral standards of this generation to be different from the norms of previous generations (Lifintsev et al., 2019). In addition, a series of recessions and financial crises, wars, threats of terrorism, political unrest, and the constant presence of social media have also influenced the growth of this generation (Kagan & Lissitsa, 2023). Gen Z displays distinctive and similar values, traits, lifestyles, characteristics and behaviors throughout the world due to the constantly changing

environment, which differentiates this group from previous generations. The Gen Z group is increasingly maturing into adulthood, making purchasing decisions, and taking care of themselves (Duffett & Maraule, 2024). Currently, the Generation Z population is 32% of the world's population. The birth time range for this generation covers the 1990s to 2012. Another opinion states that this generation was born in 1995-2012 (Kagan & Lissitsa, 2023). Other research states that this generation was born between 1997-2013 (Cao et al., 2023). These differences in views still show that Generation Z is currently in school from elementary to high school because they are still young.

Generation Z has its own unique characteristics from previous generations. This generation is known as a generation that is more creative and innovative than previous generations in solving problems (Otegui Carles et al., 2023). In addition, generation Z is known for its appreciation of social responsibility. This is reflected in the reality on the ground, which shows that Generation Z is more involved in social action (Cubukcu Cerasi & Balcioglu, 2024). generation is also known to be familiar with the task of compiling many sources of information and is easy to connect with each other. This ability makes it easier for them to share worries about life or discuss things with each other. The next characteristic of this generation is that it is known to seek comfort, security and convenience in considering their behavior (Elgammal & Al-Modaf, 2023). In making decisions, this generation is considered more intelligent, pragmatic and analytical than previous generations (Cao et al., 2023). This generation is also known for growing up amidst technology and its use of social media. Generation Z is familiar with various social media platforms such as Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram (Nordin et al., 2021). In this way, it can be seen that this generation has a variety of unique characteristics compared to subsequent generations, from traits to technology.

The most prominent uniqueness of this generation lies in the use of digital technology. Generation Z is considered the first generation to truly grow up in the digital era (Kagan & Lissitsa, 2023).). This generation is referred to as the first generation of digital natives because they grew up with easy access to a variety of digital technologies such as computers, the internet, social media and mobile devices (Squires & Ho, 2023). This generation is proficient and accustomed to using technology and participating in social media from an early age and even has a tendency to be addicted to it. Being active on social media means this generation has many connections with various people from various different backgrounds (Cubukcu Cerasi & Balcioglu, 2024). Research results show that 74% of Generation Z would prefer to communicate digitally, and another 26% would prefer to communicate face-to-face (Karácsony et al., 2020). Apart from building connections, this generation often uses technology to gather information from various sources, analyze that information, and draw conclusions that are meaningful to themselves. This generation likes the internet as a source of knowledge because of the ease of accessing it (Singh & Sibi, 2023). Knowledge sources in internet technology will be more trusted by Generation Z, especially if they come from influencers or their peers (Kagan & Lissitsa, 2023). Thus, it can be seen that the most prominent uniqueness of this generation lies in the understanding and use of digital technology.

The use of digital technology by generation Z has a different impact on various aspects of their lives. There have been various changes in areas of life in response to the uniqueness and characteristics of generation Z. These changes can be seen in the phenomenon of job searches, most of which have now moved online (Karácsony et al., 2020). Apart from that, Generation Z, who is always online on social media, is currently being targeted by various traders to promote their goods online (Duffett & Maraule, 2024). Today's merchants utilize various effective social media communication channels to reach buyers from Generation Z. The promotional process carried out online has recently turned out to be more effective in communicating the added value of sales. Apart from that, the tourism sector is also currently experiencing changes. Statistically, it turns out that purchasing tourism tickets is more often done in the digital world via online websites (Singh & Sibi, 2023). Thus, currently there are various changes taking place as an effort to adjust to the generation transition where Generation Z has started to grow up.

The various changes and characteristics of generation Z cannot be separated from the potential for character decline. This generation is considered to use many words, slang and expressions more often, which can cause serious misunderstandings with their parents (Lifintsev et al., 2019). Apart from that, the attitude that tends to follow trends as a lifestyle can be likened to a double-edged sword. Following trends can result in a decline in character if the developing trend is not in accordance with the values and norms of the Indonesian nation (Lifintsev et al., 2019). Generation Z's media consumption pattern, which is driven by satisfaction, can also be a bad thing if this generation already likes low-quality content (Kagan & Lissitsa, 2023). Various other negative behaviors that are challenges to the development of this generation include irrational behavior in

managing finances, lack of patience, desire to get instant solutions, intolerance to monotonous and consistent activities, excessive self-confidence, and being more materialistic about things (Kagan & Lissitsa, 2023). A number of these characteristics can certainly become a threat if the growth of this generation is not accompanied by optimal character education.

Character education can be a solution to various potential problems of Generation Z now and in the future. Lickona (Lickona, 1996) defines character education as a deliberate effort by schools, families, or communities to help a generation living today to better understand, care about, and act based on applicable ethical values. In this case, schools are the ideal place to carry out character education efforts. Schools ideally function as a place and forum for forming the character of students. However, Lickona (Lickona, 1996) also emphasized that various parties are involved in the character education process, such as the family environment and community environment. Optimal character education will be able to overcome various social and moral problems even though they have become serious problems. This is because character education helps generations understand, care for each other, and act with ethical values that do not trigger conflict in society (Lickona, 1996). Thus, it can be seen that character education can be a guidance effort so that Generation Z can grow optimally and avoid characters that conflict with ethical values in society.

Education carried out for generation Z needs to pay attention to the characteristics of that generation's typical learning style. Previous research reveals that each generation has different learning style preferences (Khan & Al-Shibami, 2019). Learning style implies the way an individual wants to absorb, process, understand and preserve information so that it influences students' understanding (Ishak et al., 2022). Understanding student learning styles can be beneficial in helping educators identify the most effective learning strategies. Knowledge about students' learning styles is very valuable for educators in adapting to students so as to create optimal learning (Khalid et al., 2023). Thus, it can be seen that every educator in the character education process, whether at school, family or community, needs to understand the characteristics of generation Z learning styles.

Character education in schools for generation Z can be carried out through a learning process that suits the characteristics of generation Z. Generation Z as students tend to want to obtain practical information that has useful value through an interesting active learning process (Hampton et al., 2020). To make it more interesting, the learning process, in this case, can use supporting elements in the form of the Internet and multimedia. Learning can be carried out using various multimedia formats such as video, audio, animation, simulation, game-based, and so on (Hegade & Shettar, 2022). Apart from that, learning should allow students to interact and collaborate. Generation z students prefer to be involved in hands-on learning opportunities where they can immediately apply what they learn to real-life (Cilliers, 2021). The teacher's role in the Generation Z learning process in the classroom should be to provide feedback, justice, and recognition, and carry out real practice as often as possible so that it reflects the implementation of the positive character attitudes taught (Susilo et al., 2019). Thus, it can be seen that character education learning in schools for Generation Z should be carried out as interestingly as possible, accompanied by the use of technology.

Apart from the use of technology, the character education process in schools also requires the use of appropriate learning approaches. Character education learning in schools can be implemented using a multimodal approach. Learning with a multimodal approach based on research results has been able to provide appropriate learning opportunities and challenge Generation Z students to expand their learning repertoire while increasing students' ability to work well with their peers (Albadi & Zollinger, 2021). Various learning methods that can be applied to Generation Z include discussions, pairs, role-playing, case studies, games, exercises, films, videos, podcasts, and project-based learning or problem-based learning (Pousson & Myers, 2018). According to previous research, these various approaches and methods have been proven effective in learning for Generation Z.

The character education learning approach can be aligned with the use of appropriate learning models. Several learning models are suitable for Generation Z. Generation Z learning can be implemented using a cooperative learning model. This learning model is considered capable of guiding Generation Z to better understand lessons, be more independent, and be more able to process information quickly than previous generations. This is because the learning process in the cooperative learning model encourages students to interact and collaborate to achieve common goals. The process of interacting and collaborating matches the characteristics of Generation Z's learning style (Igel & Urquhart, 2012). Apart from the cooperative learning model, another model that can be used in the learning process is the problem-based learning model. Apart from emphasizing the process of interaction and collaboration, this learning model is suitable for training the

generation's critical thinking. In this learning model, Generation Z students can practically solve everyday life problems. Students can ask, analyze, synthesize, interpret, conclude, reason, apply, and use intuition and creativity (Seibert, 2021). Thus, educators can choose these two learning models, which have been tested in the learning process with Generation Z. However, educators also have the possibility to carry out research with other learning models to test how effective these learning models are for Generation Z students.

Apart from conventional learning models, the learning process in schools can be carried out using e-learning. Current Generation Z students who already have digital devices can do so and place more emphasis on digital learning. E-learning is the latest evolution of electronic-based learning that creates, fosters, provides and facilitates learning processes anytime and anywhere using interactive network technology (Nordin et al., 2020). The current development of information and communication technology has influenced the education system, where classroom learning is integrated with electronic learning as a more effective and efficient learning method. This is because e-learning opens up opportunities for active communication between lecturers and students, especially Generation Z as digital natives. Generation z can enjoy e-learning as a learning platform because they can learn while staying connected with their friends at the same time without breaking away from technology and social media (Nordin et al., 2021). Thus, it can be seen that e-learning today can be an appropriate alternative for character education learning for Generation Z.

Character education learning for Generation Z through the role of schools cannot be separated from the role of teachers and supporting sources. Teachers in the learning process need to help students work together by paying attention to students' learning needs, supporting students' learning decision-making and critical assessment through role-playing scenarios, as well as facilitating a student-centered learning environment (DiMattio & Hudacek, 2020). The supporting elements that need to be considered in the character education process through the school environment include technology, such as smartphones and so on. This is based on research results which reveal that Generation Z is currently less interested in books. Generation Z is currently believed to be more interested in learning using technology and social media or interesting video content (Shihab, 1994). Thus, the role of teachers and also the presence of supporting sources in learning can encourage the realization of character education learning for Generation Z in the school environment.

Apart from being carried out through the home environment, character education should also be carried out through the family environment and community environment. This again refers to Lickona's view (Lickona, 1996) which states that character education can be implemented in the school environment, family environment and community environment. Character education through the family environment, in this case, must be carried out by maintaining the right approach to children. In this case, parents should be able to touch the emotional aspects of their children in the home environment (Landman et al., 2024). Apart from that, parents, as character educators of their children, always create a positive environment. In this case, parents need to teach and set an example of good communication skills with their children. The communication process carried out should be able to dig up information about the child where, which information can be used to optimize the child's abilities (Reyes et al., 2020). Families also need to create a safe environment for their children to learn. This safe environment allows every Generation Z individual to develop their ideas (Weng & Seemiller, 2024). In this case, the family is an important factor in realizing the success of children's character education (Torres & Cruz, 2024). Families can also occasionally control children's social media use according to their needs (Kim et al., 2022). Based on this, it can be seen that the family can be a way of character education for each individual.

The community environment is another way in the character education process for each individual. The process of character education for each individual through the community environment can be carried out by utilizing social media. We as a society can play a role in educating other individuals by posting character education content on social media via the internet. This is, of course, considering that Generation Z is known as a digital population that is always actively surfing social media (Torres & Cruz, 2024). Content containing positive character information sent to the internet will later penetrate social space and can be accessed and become a reminder for anyone who sees it (Tolstikova et al., 2023). Media that can be used to upload information about positive characters include YouTube (Inan et al., 2024). Other types of media that can also be used include social media which is often used by Generation Z such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Linkendln and Facebook (Cilliers, 2021). Thus, we as a society should also play a role in carrying out character education by as simple as creating content on social media about positive character. If we do not fill the content on social media with positive content, it would be a shame if millions of people consume negative content, which, of course, could not happen.

CONCLUSION

This research examines the characteristics of Generation Z and its implications for character education. The results of this research show that Generation Z has its own unique characteristics compared to other generations. The most prominent uniqueness of this generation is their ability and habits in using technology. Apart from that, this generation is also known as a generation that is more creative and innovative, has a social responsibility, is active, likes to seek comfort, prioritizes security, is easy to connect with each other, and has other characteristics. The uniqueness of Generation Z brings changes to various aspects of life, including the character education process. The character education process is still considered very necessary for this generation. Character education for this generation can be implemented through the family environment, school environment and community environment. Character education in the family environment places more emphasis on using good approaches and creating a harmonious family environment. Meanwhile, education in the school environment for Generation Z can be implemented by choosing a variety of strategies, approaches and learning models that are appropriate for this generation. Meanwhile, character education through the current community environment can be done by creating religious character posts that are uploaded to the internet via social media. The study encourages further exploration into practical experiments regarding character education across different settings. This could help refine strategies to engage Generation Z effectively and enhance their character development in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

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