

The Role of Generation Z Teachers in Learning Religious and Moral Values for Early Childhood Education in Selebar District, Bengkulu City

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Abstract

The development of digital technology has transformed the characteristics of educators, including the emergence of Generation Z teachers who demonstrate high adaptability to information technology in the learning process. These characteristics provide both opportunities and challenges in early childhood religious and moral values education, which emphasizes role modeling, habituation, and character development. This study aims to analyze the role of Generation Z teachers in teaching religious and moral values to early childhood learners, identify the challenges encountered, and describe the strategies implemented in digital era learning at kindergartens in Selebar District, Bengkulu City. This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. The participants consisted of six informants, including three Generation Z teachers and three principals from three kindergartens in Selebar District, Bengkulu City. Data were collected through observation, in depth interviews, and documentation studies, and analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings reveal that Generation Z teachers perform roles as role models, facilitators, motivators, mentors, innovators, and evaluators in religious and moral values learning. The implementation of religious and moral education is carried out through religious habituation, exemplary practices, storytelling, educational play activities, and selective use of digital media. The study also identifies challenges related to children's gadget use, limited parental involvement, pedagogical experience, and the balance between technology utilization and character formation. The findings confirm that Generation Z teachers have significant potential to provide adaptive religious and moral values education while maintaining the essence of character development.

Keywords: Generation Z Teachers; Religious and Moral Values; Early Childhood; Digital Era; Character Education.



Introduction

Early childhood represents a critical period in human development during which the foundations of cognitive, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual competencies are established. Educational experiences during this stage significantly influence children's long-term character formation, values, and personality development. Consequently, religious and moral values education constitutes a fundamental component of early childhood education because it facilitates children's moral development through teacher role modelling, continuous habituation, meaningful learning experiences, and authentic social interaction.

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed educational practices, including early childhood learning environments. Children today grow up as digital natives who are exposed to digital devices from an early age, while many schools are increasingly staffed by Generation Z teachers who demonstrate high levels of digital literacy, creativity, and familiarity with technology enhanced learning. These characteristics provide opportunities to design more engaging and interactive learning experiences. However, effective digital competence extends beyond the technical ability to operate digital devices. It requires teachers to exercise pedagogical judgement in selecting, integrating, and evaluating technologies that are developmentally appropriate and educationally meaningful. This perspective is consistent with the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, which emphasizes the integration of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge to support effective teaching (Yang & Hong, 2022). Likewise, (Masoumi & Bourbour, 2024) argue that adequate digital competence involves teachers' ability to make pedagogically informed decisions regarding when, why, and how digital technologies should be used while protecting children's cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Although digital technology offers important opportunities for learning innovation, religious and moral values education cannot rely solely on technology-mediated instruction. Character development fundamentally depends on teacher role modelling, continuous value habituation, direct interpersonal interaction, and collaborative partnerships between schools and families. Excessive digital media exposure may reduce opportunities for children to develop empathy, self-regulation, communication skills, and authentic social experiences. Therefore, technology should function as a pedagogical support that enriches teacher–child interaction rather than replacing teachers' essential roles in guiding children's moral and religious development (Undheim, 2021).

Previous studies have consistently shown that teachers' digital competence contributes to instructional innovation, student engagement, and professional development (Alruthaya dkk., 2021; Miftakhi & Pramusinto, 2023). Meanwhile, studies on religious and moral education emphasize that children's character is primarily developed through teacher role modelling, value habituation, and meaningful social interaction (Satrisno dkk., 2025). Recent international reviews further indicate that research on early childhood digital pedagogy has mainly focused on technology integration, digital competence, and instructional media, whereas research on character education has generally examined moral development from pedagogical or psychological perspectives. Moreover, digital pedagogy is increasingly viewed as a dynamic interaction among teachers, children, pedagogy, and technology rather than merely the use of digital tools (Li dkk., 2026).

Despite these advances, an important research gap remains. Existing studies rarely examine how Generation Z teachers simultaneously integrate digital competence, pedagogical judgement, teacher role modelling, authentic assessment, religious habituation, and school family collaboration within religious and moral values education. Most previous studies have treated technology integration and character

education as separate domains, providing limited explanation of how teachers balance digital innovation with the interpersonal processes required for children's moral development. Consequently, a more integrated understanding is needed to explain how Generation Z teachers negotiate technology use while preserving the pedagogical principles of early childhood character education.

Preliminary observations conducted in several kindergartens in Selebar District, Bengkulu City, indicate that many Generation Z teachers actively utilize digital resources, including educational videos, interactive presentations, and religious audiovisual media, to introduce daily prayers, prophetic stories, and moral values. Nevertheless, they also encounter challenges related to children's increasing dependence on digital devices, inconsistent parental supervision, limited teaching experience, and the need to balance technology use with direct character building practices. These conditions illustrate that the central issue is not whether Generation Z teachers possess digital competence, but how they apply pedagogical judgement to ensure that technology strengthens rather than replaces meaningful teacher child interaction in religious and moral values education.

Accordingly, this study develops an integrated analytical perspective by positioning Generation Z teachers as the central agents who connect digital competence with pedagogical practice, character education, authentic assessment, and school family collaboration. Rather than viewing technology as an independent determinant of instructional quality, this study conceptualizes digital competence as an enabling component within a broader pedagogical system that supports children's religious and moral development. In doing so, the study extends the application of the TPACK framework beyond technology integration by demonstrating the central role of pedagogical judgement in balancing technological innovation with character oriented learning.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the roles of Generation Z teachers in implementing religious and moral values education for early childhood learners, identify the challenges they encounter in digitally mediated learning environments, and explain the pedagogical strategies they employ to integrate digital competence with character-oriented education. The findings are expected to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how digital competence, teacher role modelling, religious habituation, authentic assessment, and school family collaboration interact to strengthen children's religious and moral development in the digital era.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the roles of Generation Z teachers in implementing religious and moral values learning in early childhood education. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, instructional practices, and contextual factors within natural educational settings. The study was conducted in three kindergartens located in Selebar District, Bengkulu City, Indonesia, during the 2026 academic year. The research sites were selected purposively because they employed Generation Z teachers who actively implemented religious and moral values learning in daily classroom activities.

In qualitative inquiry, the researchers served as the primary research instruments responsible for data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives. The study involved six informants, consisting of three Generation Z teachers and three kindergarten principals from the selected schools. The inclusion criteria for the teacher participants were: (1) born between 1997 and 2012, (2) actively teaching in kindergarten, (3) experienced in implementing religious and moral values learning, and (4) willing to participate

voluntarily in the study. Kindergarten principals were included as supporting informants because of their responsibility for school management, instructional supervision, and the evaluation of religious and moral values education. The characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Participants

Code	Position	Institution	Source of Data
INF 01	Teacher	TK Perjuangan	Interview
INF 02	Teacher	TK IT Al Anwar	Interview
INF 03	Teacher	TK Arsyaka	Interview
KS 01	Principal	TK Perjuangan	Interview
KS 02	Principal	TK Arsyaka	Interview
KS 03	Principal	TK IT Al Anwar	Interview

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations focused on teachers' instructional roles, teacher–child interactions, technology integration, and religious habituation practices. Interviews explored participants' experiences, challenges, and pedagogical strategies in implementing religious and moral values education. Documents analyzed included teaching modules, lesson plans, instructional media, children's learning records, school programs, and other documents related to religious and moral values learning. The use of multiple data sources enabled methodological triangulation and provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of (Miles dkk., 2013), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Analysis was conducted iteratively throughout the research process. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns and categories. Similar codes were then synthesized into four overarching themes representing the roles, evaluation practices, challenges, and pedagogical strategies of Generation Z teachers in religious and moral values learning.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source, method, and time triangulation, followed by member checking to verify the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations. Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. All participants received information regarding the research objectives and procedures, provided informed consent before participation, and were assured that their identities would remain confidential through the use of participant codes.

Results and Discussion

Generation Z Teachers as Innovators in Religious and Moral Values Learning

The findings indicate that Generation Z teachers act as pedagogical innovators by integrating digital technology with developmentally appropriate learning strategies. Rather than positioning technology as the center of instruction, teachers used digital resources to support storytelling, play-based learning, religious habituation, demonstrations, and authentic teacher–child interaction. This combination created engaging learning experiences while ensuring that religious and moral values were internalized through daily practice and social interaction.

Classroom observations conducted in three participating kindergartens showed that teachers used educational videos, religious songs, and interactive presentations primarily as learning stimuli. These media introduced daily prayers, prophetic stories, worship practices, and positive behaviours before children engaged in discussion, role-playing, and direct practice. Digital media therefore functioned as instructional support rather than replacing face-to-face interaction and character-building activities.

This finding was confirmed by one teacher:

"Usually, I show a short video or Islamic song first so that children become interested. After that, we discuss it together, and then children practice directly, such as praying, greeting others, or imitating good behaviors shown in the story." (INF01)

A school principal similarly emphasized that technology should enrich, rather than replace, direct interaction between teachers and children:

"Young teachers adapt quite quickly to technology, making learning more interesting for children. However, technology should remain a supporting tool, while teachers continue to prioritize direct interaction and habituation." (KS01)

These findings indicate that Generation Z teachers demonstrate digital competence not merely through technology use but through pedagogical judgement in selecting learning resources appropriate to children's developmental needs. This finding supports (Pöntinen & Rätty-Záborszky, 2020), who argue that effective digital competence depends on pedagogically meaningful technology integration rather than technological availability alone. Evidence from observations, interviews, and documentation consistently confirmed this pattern (Table 2).

Table 2. Triangulation of Findings

Theme	Observation	Interview	Documentation	Interpretation
Digital media	Islamic videos, songs, interactive slides	Technology used as stimulus	RPPH	Learning stimulus
Storytelling	Storytelling activities	Teachers' explanation	Photos	Moral understanding
Habituation	Daily worship	Teachers' routines	Daily schedule	Character building
Role modelling	Teacher behaviour	Interview	Observation	Value internalization
Parent collaboration	Communication	Interview	Communication book	Continuity of learning

As presented in Table 2, all major themes emerged consistently across observations, interviews, and documentation. Digital media utilization, teacher role modelling, religious habituation, interactive learning, and school–family collaboration were confirmed by multiple sources of evidence. This convergence demonstrates that Generation Z teachers systematically integrate technology into learning while maintaining direct interpersonal interaction as the principal mechanism for children's religious and moral development.

The characteristics of Generation Z teachers as a generation that has grown alongside technological development contribute positively to learning innovation. Their digital literacy enables them to select relevant media, making learning more contextual, engaging, and meaningful. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that the success of religious and moral values learning is not determined by the sophistication of the media used but by teachers' ability to integrate technology with habituation, role modelling, and consistent interpersonal interactions. These findings are consistent with Burić and Moè (2020), who identified teacher enthusiasm as an important factor in creating effective learning environments. In the present study, such enthusiasm was reflected in teachers' ability to create enjoyable, interactive, and child centered learning experiences that encouraged active participation in religious and moral values education.

These findings reinforce (Bandura, 1971) Social Learning Theory, which explains that children learn through observing and imitating significant role models. Within the present study, digital media function primarily as learning stimuli, whereas the internalization of religious and moral values occurs through continuous interaction, habituation, and teacher modelling. The findings also support the

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework proposed by (Koehler dkk., 2013), while extending it by demonstrating that pedagogical judgement serves as the essential mechanism linking digital competence with character oriented learning in early childhood education.

To highlight the theoretical contribution of the present study, the findings were compared with previous empirical studies on digital competence, technology integration, and character education. The comparison is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of Previous Studies and the Contributions of the Present Study

Previous Study	Key Finding	Contribution of the Present Study
Bandura (1971)	Learning occurs through observation and imitation of significant role models.	Demonstrates that observation is strengthened through digital supported learning followed by authentic teacher guided practice and continuous habituation.
Koehler et al. (2013)	Effective learning requires the integration of technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge (TPACK).	Extends the TPACK framework by highlighting pedagogical judgement as the mechanism linking digital competence with children's religious and moral character development.
Pöntinen & Rätty Záborszky (2020)	Digital competence supports effective technology integration in early childhood education.	Demonstrates that technology should function as a pedagogical support rather than replacing direct teacher–child interaction during value internalization.
Masoumi & Bourbour (2024)	Digital competence includes pedagogical and ethical decision making in technology use.	Extends the concept of digital competence into the context of religious and moral education by emphasizing balanced technology integration with role modelling and habituation.

As shown in Table 3, the present study not only confirms previous findings regarding the importance of digital competence and technology integration but also extends existing knowledge by demonstrating that pedagogical judgement serves as the key mechanism linking digital competence with children's religious and moral character development. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasized technological proficiency or instructional effectiveness, the present findings reveal that technology should function as a pedagogical facilitator that supports, rather than replaces, teacher role modelling, habituation, and authentic interpersonal interaction.

Generation Z Teachers as Evaluators in Religious and Moral Values Learning

The findings reveal that Generation Z teachers perceive evaluation of religious and moral values learning as a continuous and authentic process aimed at understanding children's holistic development rather than merely measuring cognitive achievement. Assessment practices were conducted systematically through classroom observations, anecdotal records, developmental checklists, children's portfolios, and continuous communication with parents. These practices indicate that teachers position assessment as an integral component of the learning process, where evidence collected from children's daily activities becomes a foundation for understanding developmental progress and improving instructional strategies. This finding aligns with contemporary perspectives on early childhood assessment, which emphasize that assessment should be embedded within children's natural learning experiences and used as a basis for pedagogical decision making rather than functioning only as a mechanism for reporting outcomes (Calo, 2022; Varier & Yun, 2023).

Based on observations conducted at TK Perjuangan, TK Arsyaka, and TK IT Al Anwar in Selebar District, Generation Z teachers continuously monitored children's behaviours during religious habituation activities, classroom interactions, worship practices, educational games, and social activities.

Teachers did not merely assess children's ability to memorize prayers or short Qur'anic verses; instead, they focused on the consistency of children's behaviours in demonstrating honesty, discipline, responsibility, respect, empathy, cooperation, and self control. This approach reflects developmentally appropriate assessment practices that recognize children's learning as a complex process involving cognitive, social emotional, and moral development. Recent studies emphasize that early childhood assessment requires teachers to interpret children's behaviours within authentic contexts because young children's competencies develop through daily interactions and meaningful experiences (Bittner, 2022; Calo, 2022).

When children demonstrated behaviours inconsistent with expected religious and moral values, teachers responded through reflective dialogue, role modelling, positive reinforcement, and repeated habituation rather than punitive approaches. The findings demonstrate that assessment was naturally integrated into daily educational practices instead of being treated as an isolated activity after learning completion. Such practices represent formative assessment principles, in which teachers continuously gather developmental information, interpret children's needs, and adjust educational interventions based on assessment evidence. (Aras, 2024) argues that formative assessment competence among early childhood teachers develops through the ability to document children's learning processes, reflect on assessment information, and modify instructional practices to support children's development.

Interview findings further confirmed that authentic assessment primarily focused on children's behavioural development and character formation rather than academic achievement alone. One teacher explained:

"I conduct evaluations through observing children's daily behaviours, anecdotal records, and communication with parents. Assessment is based on changes in children's attitudes and habits during their time at school." (INF 01)

Another teacher emphasized the continuous nature of assessment throughout classroom activities:

"Every day, we observe children's development when they play, practice worship, interact with friends, and participate in classroom activities. Through these observations, we can gradually identify changes in children's behaviours." (INF 02)

These statements demonstrate that teachers function not only as assessors but also as reflective evaluators who interpret children's developmental evidence to determine appropriate educational responses. Assessment results were used to identify children's strengths, recognize developmental challenges, and plan subsequent learning activities. This finding supports Varier and Yun (2023), who highlight that early childhood educators need assessment literacy to transform assessment information into meaningful instructional decisions. Similarly, (Calo, 2022) emphasizes that formative assessment enables teachers to collect systematic evidence of children's development and utilize this evidence to promote positive learning outcomes.

The principals also confirmed that authentic assessment had become an essential component of school culture. One principal stated:

"Teachers do not only assess learning outcomes but also record children's behavioural development every day. The assessment results are then discussed with parents so that character development can be supported continuously." (KS 02)

This perspective indicates that assessment extends beyond classroom measurement and becomes a collaborative process involving teachers, schools, and families. Communication with parents allows developmental information to be shared continuously and enables consistent reinforcement of religious and moral values between school and home environments. This finding is consistent with ecological

perspectives of child development, which emphasize that children's development is shaped through reciprocal interactions among different environments, particularly family and educational settings (Cowan & Flewitt, 2023; Guy Evans, 2025).

Documentation analysis further strengthened these findings. Assessment documents, anecdotal records, children's portfolios, developmental checklists, and communication books demonstrated that teachers systematically recorded children's developmental progress and used these records as reflective resources for improving instructional practices. Documentation was not merely administrative evidence but functioned as a pedagogical tool that enabled teachers to understand children's learning trajectories and communicate developmental achievements with families. This finding corresponds with (Bittner, 2022), who explains that documentation practices in early childhood education support reflective teaching by making children's learning processes visible. Furthermore, (Cowan & Flewitt, 2023) highlight that documentation and portfolio based assessment provide opportunities for educators and families to collaboratively understand children's development over time.

Table 4 presents the synthesis of authentic assessment practices identified across the three participating schools. The findings demonstrate that Generation Z teachers adopted a comprehensive assessment approach by combining classroom observation, anecdotal records, developmental checklists, portfolios, parent communication, and reflective follow-up activities to support continuous monitoring of children's religious and moral development.

Table 4. Authentic Assessment Practices Implemented by Generation Z Teachers

Assessment Practice	Observation	Interview	Documentation	Educational Purpose
Classroom observation	✓	✓	✓	Monitor behavioural development
Anecdotal records	✓	✓	✓	Record significant developmental progress
Developmental checklists	✓	✓	✓	Track developmental indicators
Children's portfolios	–	✓	✓	Document learning progress over time
Parent communication	–	✓	✓	Strengthen school–family collaboration
Reflective follow up	✓	✓	✓	Improve subsequent instructional planning

As presented in Table 4, authentic assessment was implemented through complementary techniques rather than relying on a single evaluation method. The combination of observation, documentation, portfolio assessment, and communication with parents enabled teachers to obtain comprehensive information regarding children's religious and moral development. These findings support recent research suggesting that effective assessment practices require teachers to integrate multiple sources of evidence and use assessment information to guide reflective pedagogical decisions (Aras, 2024; Varier & Yun, 2023).

Generation Z Teachers in Addressing Challenges of Religious and Moral Values Learning in the Digital Era

The findings reveal that Generation Z teachers encounter multidimensional challenges in implementing religious and moral values learning for young children in the digital era. These challenges are not limited to the rapid development of digital technology but also involve children's developmental characteristics, differences in family parenting practices, changing patterns of social interaction, and the

need to maintain meaningful character education within technology rich learning environments. Although Generation Z teachers demonstrate relatively strong digital familiarity, the effectiveness of religious and moral values learning remains highly dependent on teachers' pedagogical judgement, family involvement, and the quality of interpersonal interactions established in educational settings. This finding aligns with recent studies emphasizing that digital transformation in early childhood education requires teachers to critically negotiate the relationship between technology use, children's developmental needs, and meaningful pedagogical practices rather than simply adopting digital tools (Masoumi, 2021; Undheim, 2021).

Based on observations conducted at TK Perjuangan, TK Arsyaka, and TK IT Al Anwar in Selebar District, most children had become familiar with digital devices from an early age. This condition influenced children's attention patterns during learning activities, particularly when instructional experiences were less interactive or insufficiently connected with children's interests. Teachers also observed that children frequently reproduced language, behaviours, and habits obtained from digital media, requiring continuous guidance to help them understand behaviours that were consistent with religious and moral values. These findings indicate that digital media functions as an important social and cultural influence in children's lives, but its educational impact depends greatly on adult mediation and the learning environment surrounding children. Previous research confirms that children's digital experiences are shaped through interactions among technology, teachers, parents, and educational contexts, highlighting the importance of guided digital engagement in early childhood education (Lindeman dkk., 2021).

Furthermore, differences in children's concentration, emotional readiness, and learning styles required teachers to implement flexible and developmentally appropriate instructional approaches. Teachers were required to balance digital media with direct interaction, storytelling, educational games, religious habituation activities, and experiential learning. This finding demonstrates that digital competence alone is insufficient for effective early childhood education. Teachers need pedagogical knowledge to determine when, why, and how technology should be integrated to support children's holistic development. (Masoumi, 2021) emphasizes that ICT integration in early childhood education depends not only on teachers' technological abilities but also on their capacity to connect digital tools with children's developmental characteristics and educational objectives.

The observational findings were reinforced by interview data indicating that excessive gadget use and inconsistent parenting practices represented two major challenges affecting children's religious and moral development. One teacher explained:

"One of the challenges that frequently emerges is the difference between children's parenting patterns at home and at school. Some children have been accustomed to discipline at home, but others receive less habituation of moral values from their family environment." (INF 01)

These findings indicate that the internalization of religious and moral values is not solely determined by classroom instruction but is strongly influenced by children's experiences within their family environments. Differences in parenting approaches create variations in children's behavioural habits, emotional regulation, and readiness to participate in value based learning activities. This finding supports ecological perspectives of child development, which explain that children's attitudes and behaviours emerge through continuous interactions between family, school, and broader social environments (Guy Evans, 2025).

In the context of digital technology, parental involvement becomes increasingly important because children encounter behavioural models and information sources beyond direct classroom experiences. Parents serve as mediators who guide children's interpretation, regulation, and use of digital media. Recent studies indicate that parental mediation practices, including supervision, communication, and guidance, influence how children engage with digital technology and reduce potential negative effects of excessive media exposure (Scott, 2022; Shin & Lwin, 2022). Therefore, strengthening collaboration between teachers and parents becomes essential in ensuring that religious and moral values introduced at school are consistently reinforced within children's home environments.

Documentation analysis further strengthened these findings. School programmes, communication books, and records of parent–teacher interactions demonstrated that teachers routinely communicated children's behavioural development and provided recommendations regarding parental supervision of children's digital media use at home. Documentation also revealed several school initiatives designed to strengthen collaboration between schools and families in supporting children's character development. However, the effectiveness of these programmes remained dependent on parental participation and the consistency of value reinforcement within the family environment.

Table 5 presents the key challenges encountered by Generation Z teachers together with the educational responses adopted to address them. The findings suggest that effective religious and moral values learning depends on teachers' ability to respond to interconnected technological, familial, and pedagogical factors rather than technology alone.

Table 5. Challenges Encountered by Generation Z Teachers and Corresponding Educational Responses

Challenge	Evidence	Educational Impact	Teacher Response
Excessive gadget use	Observation, Interview	Reduced attention and increased distraction	Interactive and balanced learning activities
Inconsistent parenting practices	Interview, Documentation	Inconsistent value internalization	Strengthened communication with parents
Digital media influence	Observation	Behaviour inconsistent with moral values	Teacher guidance, role modelling, and habituation
Individual developmental differences	Observation	Diverse learning needs	Differentiated and child centred instruction
Continuity of character education	Documentation, Interview	Inconsistent reinforcement between school and home	School–family collaboration programmes

As presented in Table 5, the challenges experienced by Generation Z teachers are interconnected rather than isolated. Although digital technology contributes to several instructional difficulties, the findings indicate that sustainable religious and moral values learning depends primarily on maintaining continuity between school and family environments. Technology related challenges cannot be effectively addressed through digital solutions alone but require strengthened parental involvement, appropriate pedagogical strategies, and meaningful teacher–child interactions. This perspective is consistent with research emphasizing that digital technology in early childhood education should function as a complementary resource that enriches learning experiences rather than replacing social interaction and teacher guidance (Lindeman dkk., 2021; Undheim, 2021).

The findings further reveal that Generation Z teachers experience professional challenges in maintaining creativity while preserving the fundamental principles of character education. Teachers are expected to design engaging learning experiences that integrate digital media with storytelling, educational

games, demonstrations, direct practice, religious habituation, and authentic interpersonal interactions. Therefore, successful technology integration requires teachers to possess not only digital skills but also reflective pedagogical competence to determine appropriate learning approaches based on children's developmental needs (Masoumi, 2021).

These findings reinforce ecological perspectives on child development, which emphasize that children's learning and behaviour are shaped through continuous interactions among family, school, and social environments (Guy Evans, 2025). The findings also support social learning theory, which explains that children develop behaviours and values through observation, imitation, and reinforcement from significant adults (Bandura, 1971). Within this study, digital technology functions as a contextual influence rather than the primary determinant of children's religious and moral character development. Instead, sustained collaboration between teachers, families, and school communities emerges as the central mechanism enabling children to internalize religious and moral values consistently across different learning environments.

Strategies of Generation Z Teachers in Optimizing Religious and Moral Values Learning

The findings indicate that Generation Z teachers implement multiple complementary strategies to optimize religious and moral values learning in the digital era. These strategies extend beyond the proportional use of educational technology and encompass the development of positive school culture, teacher role modelling, religious habituation, authentic assessment, continuous professional development, and active collaboration with families. Rather than relying on a single instructional approach, Generation Z teachers integrate these interconnected strategies to create meaningful learning experiences that support children's holistic character development. This finding suggests that effective religious and moral values learning requires a holistic pedagogical approach in which technology functions as one component within a broader educational system centred on children's developmental needs and authentic social interaction (Masoumi, 2021; Undheim, 2021).

Based on observations conducted at TK Perjuangan, TK Arsyaka, and TK IT Al Anwar in Selebar District, learning activities consistently began with religious habituation practices, including greeting others, reciting prayers before learning, memorizing short Qur'anic verses, and participating in congregational *dhuha* prayers according to each school's context. Throughout daily learning activities, teachers continuously encouraged children to maintain cleanliness, share with peers, respect teachers and parents, communicate politely, and demonstrate responsibility and discipline. These habituation practices were not limited to classroom instruction but had become an integral component of the schools' educational culture.

The findings demonstrate that repeated religious habituation provides children with continuous opportunities to transform moral knowledge into daily behaviour. Rather than learning values through verbal instruction alone, children gradually internalize religious and moral principles through repeated practice, observation, and participation in meaningful social experiences. This finding is consistent with social learning theory, which emphasizes that children's behaviours develop through observation, imitation, and reinforcement provided by significant adults within their social environments (Bandura, 1971). Consequently, teachers' everyday behaviours become important pedagogical resources that influence children's character formation.

The implementation of religious and moral values was further strengthened through contextual learning activities that actively engaged children in meaningful social experiences. One teacher explained:

“One example of what I do is the Friday food sharing program. Children are asked to bring simple food to share with their friends. Through this activity, children learn to share, care for others, and appreciate their peers.” (INF 01)

These findings indicate that religious and moral values are more effectively internalized when children participate directly in authentic learning experiences rather than merely receiving moral instruction. Contextual activities such as sharing, helping peers, and participating in collective religious practices enable children to connect abstract values with real life situations, thereby strengthening the development of empathy, cooperation, responsibility, and respect for others.

Observation findings also demonstrated that teachers utilized digital media selectively as instructional support rather than as the central component of learning. Islamic animated videos, educational presentations, religious songs, and interactive digital resources were generally introduced during the initial stages of instruction to stimulate children's interest and motivation. However, the subsequent learning process consistently emphasized storytelling, educational games, demonstrations, role playing, direct practice, and authentic teacher–child interaction. This balanced approach demonstrates that digital technology serves as a pedagogical resource rather than a replacement for interpersonal interaction. Previous studies similarly emphasize that technology contributes positively to early childhood education only when integrated with developmentally appropriate pedagogy, meaningful teacher guidance, and children's active participation in learning (Lindeman dkk., 2021; Undheim, 2021).

Interview findings further revealed that continuous communication with parents constituted one of the most important strategies for strengthening children's character development. Teachers regularly communicated children's developmental progress through communication books, WhatsApp groups, and direct discussions during school drop off and pick up times. These communication practices enabled schools and families to establish consistent approaches toward religious habituation and moral development across both educational settings.

One teacher explained:

“The school has parenting programs and religious activities involving parents, such as Islamic commemorative events and collective charity activities. These programs aim to ensure that religious and moral values habituation can be continuously implemented both at home and at school.” (INF 01)

These findings demonstrate that parents are not merely recipients of information from schools but active partners in supporting children's character development. The continuity of religious habituation between home and school strengthens children's opportunities to practice values consistently across different learning environments. This finding aligns with (Goodall, 2021), who argues that parental engagement should be understood as a collaborative partnership in which schools and families share responsibility for supporting children's learning and development rather than viewing parents solely as supporters of school programmes.

Documentation analysis confirmed that these collaborative programmes were implemented systematically and had become an integral part of school activities. School records, activity documentation, communication books, and parenting programmes consistently demonstrated efforts to strengthen partnerships between teachers and families in supporting children's religious and moral development. Documentation also indicated that continuity between school and home environments contributed significantly to sustaining children's character formation and reinforcing positive behavioural habits over time.

Table 6 summarizes the strategies implemented by Generation Z teachers to optimize religious and moral values learning. The findings indicate that effective learning is achieved through the integration of complementary pedagogical strategies rather than reliance on a single instructional practice.

Table 6. Strategies Implemented by Generation Z Teachers to Optimize Religious and Moral Values Learning

Strategy	Implementation	Expected Educational Outcome
Religious habituation	Daily prayers, greetings, worship routines, positive habits	Character formation through repeated practice
Teacher role modelling	Demonstrating exemplary behaviour	Internalization of religious and moral values
Proportional use of digital media	Videos, songs, interactive presentations as learning stimuli	Increased engagement without reducing authentic interaction
Authentic assessment	Continuous observation, portfolios, anecdotal records	Ongoing monitoring of children's character development
School–family collaboration	Communication books, WhatsApp groups, parenting programmes	Consistent value reinforcement across learning environments
Professional development	Training, webinars, learning communities	Improved pedagogical and technological competence

As presented in Table 6, no single strategy independently supports children's religious and moral development. Instead, effective character education is achieved through the integration of religious habituation, teacher role modelling, authentic assessment, proportional technology utilization, continuous professional development, and active collaboration with families. The convergence of these strategies demonstrates that children's character formation is supported by a comprehensive pedagogical system in which each component reinforces the others. This finding is consistent with recent research emphasizing that effective early childhood education requires teachers to integrate assessment evidence, pedagogical competence, and reflective practice in designing meaningful learning experiences (Aras, 2024; Varier & Yun, 2023).

The findings further indicate that Generation Z teachers continuously improve their professional competence through training programmes, webinars, professional learning communities, and continuing professional development activities. These initiatives enable teachers to strengthen both technological competence and pedagogical expertise while adapting instructional strategies to children's developmental characteristics. Accordingly, digital competence is utilized not merely to improve instructional media but to design innovative learning experiences that remain centred on children's religious and moral development. This perspective supports (Masoumi, 2021), who emphasizes that technology integration in early childhood education depends on teachers' ability to combine technological competence with pedagogical knowledge and an understanding of children's developmental needs.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the strategies implemented by Generation Z teachers constitute a holistic pedagogical framework integrating technological adaptation with character oriented educational practices. Religious habituation, teacher role modelling, authentic assessment, proportional technology use, continuous professional development, and school–family collaboration function as interconnected components of a comprehensive learning system. Rather than positioning technology as the primary driver of educational quality, Generation Z teachers utilize digital resources to enrich learning while preserving authentic interaction, meaningful habituation, and collaborative partnerships with families.

Cross Theme Synthesis and Conceptual Model

The synthesis of findings across the four themes Generation Z teachers as innovators, evaluators, challengers, and strategic facilitators reveals a coherent pedagogical framework for religious and moral values learning in early childhood education. Rather than functioning as isolated professional roles, these dimensions operate as interconnected components of a unified pedagogical system. The findings consistently demonstrate that digital technology serves as a pedagogical resource that supports, rather than determines, learning effectiveness. Instead, the quality of religious and moral values learning depends on teachers' ability to integrate technology with developmentally appropriate pedagogy, authentic teacher–child interaction, and continuous character formation practices.

Across all themes, pedagogical judgement emerges as the central mechanism connecting digital competence with children's religious and moral development. Generation Z teachers demonstrate digital competence not simply through the use of technological tools but through informed decisions regarding when, why, and how technology should be integrated according to children's developmental characteristics and learning objectives. Consequently, digital media function primarily as learning stimuli, while teacher role modelling, religious habituation, authentic assessment, and school–family collaboration remain the principal processes through which children internalize religious and moral values.

Building upon these findings, this study proposes an integrated conceptual model that extends the application of the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework in early childhood character education. The proposed model positions pedagogical judgement as the connecting mechanism through which digital competence strengthens teacher role modelling, religious habituation, authentic assessment, and school–family collaboration. This perspective suggests that effective technology integration is achieved not by increasing technological sophistication but by ensuring that digital resources are employed to enrich meaningful pedagogical experiences that promote children's holistic religious and moral development.



Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Religious and Moral Values Learning by Generation Z Teachers in the Digital Era

Figure 2 illustrates that digital competence functions as an enabling condition rather than an independent determinant of learning effectiveness. The model demonstrates that pedagogical judgement mediates the relationship between digital competence and character-oriented learning by guiding teachers in integrating technology with role modelling, religious habituation, authentic assessment, and school family collaboration. Together, these interconnected components form a holistic pedagogical system that

supports the development of children's religious and moral values in digitally mediated learning environments.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Generation Z teachers play a strategic role in religious and moral values learning for early childhood education through their integrated roles as role models, facilitators, motivators, guides, innovators, and evaluators in developing children's religious character. Despite facing various challenges, including children's increasing use of digital devices, diverse family parenting patterns, and the need to balance technology utilization with authentic learning experiences, teachers are able to optimize learning through strengthening role modeling, religious habituation, authentic assessment, proportional use of digital media, continuous professional development, and sustainable collaboration between schools and families.

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of religious and moral values learning conducted by Generation Z teachers is not solely determined by digital competence but is constructed through the integration of five main components: digital competence, teacher role modeling, religious habituation, authentic assessment, and school–family collaboration. The integration of these components forms a conceptual framework for adaptive religious and moral values learning that responds to technological developments while maintaining the fundamental principles of character education in early childhood.

This study implies that early childhood education institutions need to support Generation Z teachers through continuous professional development, strengthening pedagogical competence, and establishing collaborative partnerships with families to ensure that technology functions as a supporting medium in character formation rather than replacing direct interaction and exemplary practices.

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