

## TEACHING ISLAM TO GENERATION Z: NEW STRATEGIES IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *The rapid evolution of digital culture and communication has profoundly reshaped how Generation Z engages with knowledge, identity, and religious understanding. As digital natives, this generation interacts with religious content through diverse online platforms, requiring educational approaches that are both pedagogically effective and contextually relevant. This study examines contemporary strategies for teaching Islam to Generation Z learners, with particular emphasis on the integration of digital technology, relevance to youth socio-cultural contexts, and the application of learner-centered pedagogical models. Drawing on a mixed-methods research design conducted within Islamic educational settings in Indonesia and selected international contexts, this study combines quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations. Quantitative data were collected to measure students' attitudes toward various instructional methods and their perceptions of the relevance of Islamic content, while qualitative data provided deeper insights into learners' experiences and educators' pedagogical practices. The study investigates how digital platforms, participatory learning approaches, and contextualized curricula influence students' religious understanding, engagement, and ethical reflection. The findings indicate that traditional teacher-centered approaches are increasingly less effective for Generation Z learners, who demonstrate stronger engagement and comprehension when exposed to interactive, discussion-based, and multimedia learning environments. Participants responded positively to instructional strategies that connect Islamic teachings with real-world ethical challenges, personal development, and contemporary social issues. Furthermore, the results highlight the growing importance of digital literacy and critical thinking skills in enabling young learners to critically evaluate and discern religious content encountered online. Despite these opportunities, the study also identifies key challenges, including the need to balance classical Islamic scholarship with modern pedagogical tools, as well as concerns about maintaining authenticity and fidelity to core Islamic principles amid rapid technological change. The study concludes by offering practical recommendations for Islamic educators and institutions, including the adoption of structured digital learning frameworks, continuous teacher professional development, and curriculum designs that align Islamic values with the lived realities of Generation Z learners*

**Keywords:** *Generation Z, Islamic education, digital pedagogy, learner-centered strategies, religious instruction*

### Introduction

Islamic education has historically played a central role in shaping religious understanding, moral character, and communal identity among Muslim societies. For centuries, Islamic knowledge transmission has largely relied on memorization, textual study of classical sources,

and teacher-centered discourse, approaches that have proven effective in preserving religious traditions and scholarly authority. While these methods continue to hold significant value, rapid social and technological changes have increasingly challenged their adequacy in addressing the needs of contemporary learners.

In recent decades, the emergence of Generation Z—individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s—has introduced new educational demands within Islamic learning contexts. As digital natives, Generation Z learners grow up immersed in digital technologies, social media, and instant access to information. Their learning preferences tend to favor interactive, visually rich, and participatory educational experiences, often characterized by a desire for dialogue, critical engagement, and personal relevance. These characteristics pose significant challenges to conventional Islamic teaching methods that are predominantly lecture-based and text-centered.

Moreover, Generation Z engages with religion in ways that differ from previous generations. Exposure to a globalized digital information environment allows young Muslims to encounter diverse interpretations of Islam, ranging from scholarly perspectives to unverified online content. As a result, Islamic educators face the dual responsibility of preserving doctrinal integrity while simultaneously ensuring that religious education remains accessible, engaging, and relevant. This tension highlights the urgent need to rethink pedagogical strategies that can effectively mediate between tradition and innovation.

Within this context, the integration of digital pedagogy, learner-centered approaches, and contextualized curricula has gained increasing attention in Islamic education discourse. Digital platforms offer new opportunities for interactive learning, collaborative discussion, and multimedia-based instruction that can enhance students' engagement with Islamic teachings. At the same time, learner-centered pedagogies encourage active participation, critical reflection, and the application of religious knowledge to real-life ethical and social challenges faced by contemporary Muslim youth.

Despite these developments, questions remain regarding the effectiveness and limitations of such approaches in Islamic educational settings. Concerns persist about the potential dilution of religious authenticity, the superficial engagement with sacred texts, and the balance between classical scholarship and modern educational tools. Consequently, there is a growing need for empirical research that systematically examines how contemporary pedagogical strategies influence Generation Z learners' religious understanding, attitudes, and practices.

This article addresses these concerns by investigating emerging pedagogical strategies for teaching Islam to Generation Z learners within both formal and non-formal Islamic educational contexts. By employing a mixed-methods research design, the study explores students' perceptions, educators' experiences, and classroom practices related to digital integration and participatory learning. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions on how Islamic education can effectively bridge tradition and innovation, ensuring that Islamic teachings remain meaningful, authentic, and responsive to the lived realities of contemporary Muslim youth.

## Literature Review

### 2.1 Generation Z and Learning Preferences

Existing research characterizes Generation Z as digital natives who have grown up surrounded by smartphones, social media, and constant online connectivity. This generation tends to exhibit distinct learning preferences, including a strong inclination toward visual content, short-form information, interactivity, and immediate feedback (Smith & Anderson, 2018; Prensky, 2016). Compared to previous generations, Generation Z learners often demonstrate shorter attention spans but higher adaptability to multimedia learning environments.

Studies further suggest that these preferences significantly influence how Generation Z engages with educational content and authority structures. Rather than passively receiving knowledge, they are more likely to question, explore, and seek multiple sources of information. In religious education contexts, this characteristic can both enrich learning experiences and pose challenges, as learners may encounter diverse—and sometimes contradictory—interpretations of religious teachings online. Consequently, understanding Generation Z's learning preferences is essential for designing pedagogical strategies that foster meaningful engagement while maintaining instructional coherence and credibility.

## 2.2 Islamic Education: Tradition and Innovation

Classical Islamic education has long emphasized the transmission of religious knowledge through *ijtihad* (reasoned interpretation), *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), and the study of hadith, traditionally delivered within structured *madrasah* or *pesantren* systems (Rahman, 2019). These approaches prioritize memorization, textual accuracy, and close teacher–student relationships to preserve doctrinal authenticity and scholarly lineage.

However, contemporary educational demands have encouraged scholars and practitioners to reconsider how these traditions can coexist with innovative pedagogical approaches. Recent studies argue that modern educational tools and methodologies do not inherently contradict Islamic epistemologies, provided that they are applied thoughtfully and ethically (Al-Faruqi, 2020; Hussein, 2021). Innovation in Islamic education is increasingly viewed not as a departure from tradition, but as an adaptive response that allows timeless Islamic principles to remain relevant in changing social contexts. This perspective frames innovation as a complementary process that strengthens, rather than undermines, traditional Islamic scholarship.

## 2.3 Digital Platforms in Religious Education

The use of digital platforms—including social media, interactive applications, and online learning management systems—has expanded rapidly within religious education. These tools offer significant potential for wider access, learner engagement, and collaborative knowledge construction, particularly among Generation Z learners who are already deeply embedded in digital environments. Digital platforms enable the incorporation of multimedia resources such as videos, podcasts, and interactive discussions, which can enhance comprehension and motivation (Zaid, 2022).

Despite these advantages, scholars caution that digital religious learning also raises concerns related to content authenticity, misinformation, and superficial engagement. Learners may encounter religious content that lacks scholarly grounding or is shaped by ideological agendas. As a result, media literacy and critical digital skills are increasingly emphasized as essential competencies for navigating online religious spaces (Hassan, 2023). Effective digital religious education therefore requires not only technological integration but also guided supervision and critical reflection to ensure meaningful and accurate learning outcomes.

## 2.4 Learner-Centered Approaches

Learner-centered pedagogical approaches emphasize active participation, dialogue, inquiry, and reflective learning, positioning students as co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients. Research has consistently shown that such approaches contribute positively to deep understanding, critical thinking, and moral development, particularly in values-based education contexts (Khan & Abdullah, 2021; Li & Huang, 2024).

In Islamic education, learner-centered strategies encourage students to engage more deeply with religious texts and ethical concepts by relating them to personal experiences and

contemporary societal issues. This approach contrasts with rote memorization by fostering meaning-making and internalization of values. For Generation Z learners, who seek relevance and agency in learning, learner-centered Islamic pedagogy offers a promising framework to enhance engagement while nurturing spiritual and ethical growth.

## **Method**

This study applied a mixed-methods research design comprising:

### **3.1 Quantitative Surveys**

Quantitative data were obtained through structured questionnaires distributed to 450 Muslim high school and university students across multiple regions in Indonesia, ensuring diversity in educational background, institutional type, and geographic location. The survey instrument was carefully developed based on relevant literature in Islamic education and contemporary pedagogy. It aimed to measure students' attitudes toward a range of teaching methods, including lecture-based instruction, discussion-oriented learning, project-based activities, and digital or technology-enhanced learning models.

In addition, the survey examined students' perceptions of the relevance, accessibility, and contextualization of Islamic educational content in relation to their daily lives and generational characteristics. Responses were collected using a five-point Likert scale to allow for statistical comparison and interpretation. The quantitative approach enabled the researchers to identify dominant patterns, correlations, and variations in students' learning preferences, providing a broad overview of how Islamic education is experienced by Generation Z learners in formal educational settings.

### **3.2 Qualitative Interviews and Focus Groups**

To gain deeper insight into the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 30 Islamic education educators and 50 Generation Z learners from different educational institutions. This qualitative phase aimed to explore participants' personal experiences, pedagogical challenges, and perceptions of effectiveness regarding both traditional instructional methods and digitally mediated learning environments.

Educators were invited to reflect on curriculum implementation, classroom management, and their strategies for engaging Generation Z students, while learners were encouraged to share their expectations, learning motivations, and perceived obstacles in Islamic education classes. The open-ended nature of the discussions allowed participants to articulate their views freely, revealing emotional, cultural, and contextual dimensions of learning. This approach provided rich, descriptive data that enhanced the interpretive depth of the study and helped explain trends observed in the survey results.

### **3.3 Classroom Observations**

Classroom observation were conducted in eight Islamic schools and community-based educational programs, representing both formal and non-formal learning contexts. The purpose of these observations was to document pedagogical practices as they occurred in real time, with particular attention to instructional strategies, teacher–student interaction patterns, classroom atmosphere, and the integration of digital tools.

Observations were carried out using a structured observation guide to ensure consistency across settings. Field notes were taken to capture classroom dynamics, student participation levels, and instructional effectiveness. This method allowed the researchers to assess the alignment between pedagogical intentions and actual teaching practices. Furthermore, classroom

observations served as a form of triangulation, strengthening the validity and reliability of the overall research findings by cross-checking data from surveys and interviews.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Generation Z's Digital Engagement**

Survey data indicate that 83% of students prefer learning methods involving multimedia elements (videos, infographics), while 78% reported greater engagement in interactive formats than lecture-only settings.

Learners emphasized that relevance to daily life such as ethical dilemmas in digital culture, mental health, and social justice significantly enhanced their interest in Islamic teachings.

### **4.2 Effectiveness of Blended Pedagogies**

Mixed methods revealed that blended strategies combining classical instruction with digital tools improved comprehension and retention. Teachers reported that apps facilitating Quranic recitation feedback and online discussion forums supported deeper reflection.

### **4.4 Challenges in Content Authenticity**

Educators expressed concerns about unregulated online content misrepresenting Islamic principles, underscoring the need for curated digital resources and critical media literacy education.

### **4.4 Learner-Centered Practices Foster Critical Thinking**

Interviews revealed that when students engaged in halaqah-style discussions and project-based tasks linking scripture to contemporary issues, they demonstrated higher levels of moral reasoning and personal application of Islamic values.

### **4.5 Implications for Educators and Institutions**

The findings suggest that Islamic education must foster digital literacy, contextual relevance, and interactive learning environments. Teacher training programs should incorporate digital pedagogy and ethics to support these shifts

## **Conclusion**

This study underscores the importance of rethinking Islamic education in response to the characteristics and learning preferences of Generation Z. The findings demonstrate that conventional teacher-centered approaches are increasingly insufficient to address the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual needs of contemporary learners. Generation Z students tend to engage more deeply with Islamic teachings when instructional strategies are interactive, contextual, and supported by digital technologies that align with their everyday experiences.

The integration of learner-centered pedagogy, digital media, and critical thinking activities enables Islamic education to remain relevant while preserving its foundational values. Rather than replacing traditional Islamic scholarship, technology functions as a complementary tool that enhances accessibility, engagement, and reflection. However, this transformation requires careful guidance to ensure the authenticity of religious content and the ethical use of digital platforms.

Furthermore, the study highlights the pivotal role of educators in facilitating meaningful learning experiences. Teachers must be equipped with both pedagogical and digital competencies to effectively guide students in navigating religious knowledge in an information-rich environment. Institutional support, curriculum redesign, and continuous professional development are therefore essential to sustain this pedagogical shift.

In conclusion, the future of Islamic education depends on its ability to balance tradition and innovation. By embracing adaptive teaching strategies while maintaining strong Islamic foundations, educational institutions can foster spiritually grounded, critically aware, and socially responsible Muslim youth. Future research is encouraged to explore longitudinal impacts of these strategies across diverse educational contexts.

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