

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SHAPING THE CHARACTER OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract

The digital era has had a significant impact on the mindset, behaviour and lifestyle of the younger generation. These changes require education that is not only knowledge-oriented, but also focuses on building strong character. Religious education has a strategic role in instilling moral, ethical and spiritual values, which are the main foundations for facing the challenges of globalisation and the rapid flow of information. This study aims to analyse the role of religious education in shaping the character of the younger generation in the digital age, focusing on the internalisation of religious values, relevant learning methods, and the use of technology as an educational medium. The research method used is a literature study with a descriptive qualitative approach, examining various literature related to religious education, technological developments, and character building. The results of the study show that religious education is effective in strengthening the values of integrity, responsibility, tolerance, and social awareness when supported by innovative learning methods and the wise use of digital technology. In conclusion, religious education plays an important role as a moral fortress for the younger generation, as well as a guideline in building noble character amid the challenges and opportunities of the digital age.

Keywords: religious education, character of the younger generation, digital era, moral values, learning technology.

Introduction

In the digital age, marked by advances in information and communication technology, the younger generation faces a variety of complex challenges. The influence of social media, the internet, and unlimited access to information often has both positive and negative effects. In this context, religious education plays an important role in shaping the character of the younger generation. Religious education not only serves to teach spiritual values, but also to shape good attitudes and behaviour amid the rapid flow of information.

For example, many young people today are exposed to negative content on social media, such as fake news, hate speech, and other unethical behaviour. This can influence their mindset and behaviour, making them more vulnerable to bad influences. This is where religious education plays a role as a filter that can help them sort out good and bad information. Good religious education can provide a strong moral foundation, so that the younger generation can be wiser in using the technology and information they access.

According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2021, the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 202.6 million people, or around

73.7% of the total population. This figure shows that the younger generation is increasingly exposed to various information that can influence their mindset and behaviour. In this context, religious education can serve as a filter that helps the younger generation sort through good and bad information and shape their character in accordance with religious values. For example, by applying religious principles in their daily lives, young people can more easily avoid negative content and choose to engage in positive and beneficial activities.

Religious education in schools, both formal and non-formal, has the potential to shape strong and resilient character. Through learning based on religious values, students are taught to have integrity, empathy, and responsibility.

For example, in Islamic religious education, students are taught about the importance of guarding their speech and not spreading news whose truth is unclear. This can help them to be more critical in responding to information they encounter in the virtual world. In addition, religious education can also provide an understanding of the importance of respecting differences and upholding the values of tolerance. Thus, students not only learn to become good individuals spiritually, but also responsible citizens.

However, the challenges in implementing religious education in the digital age cannot be ignored. One of the main challenges is the shift in values that has occurred due to the influence of global culture and social media. The younger generation is often exposed to values that conflict with religious teachings, such as materialism and individualism. Therefore, it is important for educators and parents to work together to provide a balanced education between religious values and the life skills needed in the modern world. Strategies to optimise religious education in the digital age also need to be considered. One such strategy is to utilise technology itself as a tool for conveying religious values. For example, mobile applications can be used to provide interactive and engaging religious education content for the younger generation. In this way, religious education can be delivered in a manner that is more relevant and tailored to their needs. In addition, collaboration between schools, families, and communities is also very important in creating an environment that supports effective religious learning.

In this journal, the author will discuss several important aspects related to the role of religious education, including its influence on character building, the challenges faced, and strategies for optimising religious education in the digital age. Through comprehensive analysis, it is hoped that a clear picture of the importance of religious education in shaping a quality younger generation can be provided. Thus, religious education not only serves to teach spiritual values, but also as an effort to build strong character in the midst of the challenges of the times. In facing various negative influences that come from the digital world, religious education can be a guide that helps the younger generation to stay on the right path. Therefore, it is important for all parties to realise the vital role of religious education in shaping the younger generation to be not only intellectually intelligent, but also to have good character and noble morals. Amidst the rapid flow of information and

complex challenges in the digital age, religious education has a very important role in shaping the character of the younger generation. By providing a strong moral foundation, religious education can help them sort through information, develop positive attitudes, and face challenges wisely. Therefore, there needs to be a joint effort from various parties to optimise religious education so that the younger generation can grow into individuals of quality, integrity, and capable of making positive contributions to society.

Research Method

The research method used is a qualitative method with a literature study approach. In this context, the qualitative method was chosen because it allows researchers to explore complex social phenomena, such as the influence of religious education on the character formation of the younger generation. This method gives researchers the flexibility to understand the subjective meanings and experiences of the individuals involved, as well as to identify patterns that may not be detectable through quantitative methods.

Data was collected through analysis of documents, articles, and previous studies relevant to the theme of religious education and the character of the younger generation. The document analysis process involved collecting various written sources, such as books, scientific journals, research reports, and articles discussing religious education. For example, researchers can refer to studies conducted by experts in the fields of education and psychology that show how religious education can shape moral and ethical values in children. By analysing these various sources, researchers can identify emerging trends and themes, as well as understand the broader context of the phenomenon being studied.

Research Findings

Research findings indicate that religious education contributes significantly to character building, particularly in terms of developing basic moral values. Religious education not only serves to teach doctrine and rituals, but also as a tool for building a strong ethical foundation in students. However, the effectiveness of religious education declines significantly when it is not integrated with the digital context that is an integral part of students' daily lives today. In an era where information and communication technology is developing rapidly, it is important for religious education to adapt and be relevant to the digital environment faced by the younger generation.

The integration of contextual learning is one way to overcome this challenge. By connecting religious teachings with real-world examples in the digital world, students can more easily understand and internalise the values being taught. For example, when discussing honesty in a religious context, teachers can provide examples of cases that often occur on social media, such as the spread of fake news or hoaxes. In this way, students not only learn about honesty in theory, but also see the real implications of dishonest behaviour in the digital world. This makes learning more relevant and

interesting, and helps students develop critical thinking skills in relation to the information they receive.

The ability of teachers to facilitate critical thinking is also very important in this context. Teachers do not only act as conveyors of information, but also as guides who help students analyse and evaluate the information they encounter. By asking thought-provoking questions, teachers can encourage students to think more deeply about the values taught in religion and how these values can be applied in everyday life, especially in their interactions in the virtual world. For example, in a discussion about religious tolerance, teachers can ask students to share their experiences of interacting with people from different religious backgrounds on social media. This not only enriches students' perspectives, but also fosters empathy and appreciation for differences. Support from the family is also an important asset in religious education and character building for students. The family plays a central role in shaping children's values and attitudes, and when families are involved in the religious education process, the results tend to be more positive. For example, when parents actively discuss religious values at home and set an example of behaviour consistent with religious teachings, children will find it easier to absorb and apply these values in their daily lives. In addition, parents who understand the challenges their children face in the digital world can provide better guidance in overcoming problems that arise, such as peer pressure or the negative influence of digital content. However, behind all the positive potential offered by religious education in the digital context, there are serious challenges that need to be addressed. Exposure to unfiltered digital content is one of the main challenges faced by students. Without adequate digital literacy and clear ethical guidelines, students can easily become trapped in the negative norms that circulate in the virtual world. For example, much of the content on social media promotes intolerance, hatred, or other harmful behaviours. Without the ability to analyse and evaluate such content, students may imitate behaviours that are not in line with the moral values taught in religious education.

To overcome this challenge, it is important for religious education to not only focus on teaching moral values, but also to provide the necessary digital literacy skills. Students need to be taught how to recognise credible information, understand the impact of their actions in the digital world, and develop a critical attitude towards the content they consume. For example, religious education can include lessons on how to evaluate information sources, recognise bias, and understand the consequences of spreading inaccurate information. In this way, students become not only passive consumers of information, but also active and responsible individuals interacting in the digital world.

For example, many schools have begun to integrate technology into religious education, such as using mobile applications for learning the Qur'an or online platforms for group discussions. This not only makes learning more interesting, but also relevant to students' daily lives. However, on the other hand, there is a risk that the use of this technology can reduce the depth of students' understanding of religious values if it is not balanced with the right approach. Therefore, it is important for educators to find a balance

between the use of technology and the teaching of deep moral values. An in-depth analysis of every aspect of religious education also shows that the role of parents is crucial in supporting their children's religious education. Parents who are actively involved in their children's religious education tend to create an environment conducive to character development. For example, parents who regularly invite their children to worship together or discuss religious values at home can help instil a better understanding of ethics and morals. This shows that religious education is not only the responsibility of schools, but also a collaboration between schools and families.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important for educators and parents to work together in creating an environment that supports the learning of religious values, so that the younger generation can grow into individuals who are not only knowledgeable, but also have strong character and good moral values. Thus, religious education can become a solid foundation for guiding the younger generation in facing future challenges.

This is because religious education plays a very important role in shaping the character of the younger generation in the digital age. By imparting moral and ethical values, religious education can help the younger generation to face the various challenges that arise as a result of technological developments. The integration of religious education into the formal education curriculum and the use of technology in teaching can increase the effectiveness of religious education. Therefore, it is important for all parties, including the government, schools, and the community, to work together to strengthen religious education as a moral foundation for the younger generation in the digital age.

However, to ensure its effectiveness in this digital age, religious education needs to be integrated with relevant digital contexts. Through contextual learning, teachers' ability to facilitate critical thinking, and support from families, students can better understand and apply religious values in their daily lives. On the other hand, the challenges arising from exposure to unfiltered digital content must be overcome by improving digital literacy and providing clear ethical guidelines. With these steps, religious education can contribute maximally to shaping a young generation that not only has good character but is also able to adapt well in this increasingly complex world.

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