



## **The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Fostering the Moral Development of Generation Z in Multicultural Schools**

**Hengki Satrisno<sup>✉</sup>, Al Fauzan Amin, Dhioba Sinata, Fakhri Muhammad Ramadhan, Geon Protomo**

Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno, Bengkulu, Indonesia

### **Abstract**

This study examines the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in strengthening the moral character of Generation Z in multicultural school environments. The research aims to identify PAI-based strategies used to foster tolerance, honesty, discipline, and cooperation among students with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through in-depth interviews with Gen Z students, PAI teachers, non-PAI teachers, and student council members, as well as through observation and documentation. The findings indicate that PAI plays educative, preventive, and integrative roles in moral formation. Moral violations such as bullying, minor conflicts, and indiscipline decreased significantly after PAI-based interventions. The study concludes that PAI contributes effectively to developing moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral action, while creating a harmonious multicultural school climate.

**Keywords:** Islamic Religious Education, Moral Education, Multicultural School

## Introduction

Social and technological developments in the modern era have significantly influenced the ways students think, behave, and construct moral judgments, particularly among Generation Z. This generation grows within an environment characterized by rapid information exchange, digital interaction, and increasing cultural diversity. Exposure to multiple value systems has shaped students' perspectives in complex ways. Moral orientation is no longer formed solely through family and school environments. Digital media and peer interaction increasingly contribute to moral reasoning. These conditions require educational institutions to respond thoughtfully to emerging moral challenges (Sri Haryati, 2013).

Cultural, religious, and social diversity within schools has created a dynamic educational landscape. Multicultural settings encourage interaction among students from varied backgrounds. Such interaction holds the potential to foster mutual understanding and social cohesion. Challenges emerge when differences are not managed constructively. Declining mutual respect, intolerance, and interpersonal conflict have become visible issues in several educational contexts. Moral education therefore becomes a crucial foundation for sustaining harmony in diverse learning environments (Jayanti, 2023).

Empirical studies indicate that moral challenges among students manifest in both direct and indirect forms. Interactions across cultural and religious boundaries sometimes result in misunderstanding and tension. Bullying and discriminatory behavior may occur not only in physical spaces but also through digital platforms. Online communication often amplifies conflict due to anonymity and lack of ethical restraint. These patterns highlight the urgency of structured moral guidance within schools. Moral development must address real-life contexts experienced by students.

Formal education holds a central role in shaping students' moral orientation. Schools function as social spaces where values are practiced and internalized daily. Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role within this framework. Its function extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge. Moral formation becomes an essential dimension of its educational mission. Ethical values are introduced as guiding principles for personal and social behavior.

Islamic Religious Education emphasizes the cultivation of honesty, discipline, responsibility, and tolerance (Hidayat & Malihah, 2023). These values are rooted in universal Islamic teachings that promote balance and moderation. Learning processes that integrate moral reflection encourage students to translate values into action. Moral internalization becomes more effective when supported by consistent practice. Character education therefore requires systematic reinforcement across learning activities. Islamic values offer a strong moral foundation for diverse educational environments.

Previous research suggests that contextual learning strengthens moral development outcomes. Moral education becomes more meaningful when linked to students' lived experiences. Multicultural classroom settings provide opportunities to practice tolerance and empathy. Instruction that acknowledges diversity enhances students' moral sensitivity. Islamic Religious Education gains relevance when presented in an inclusive manner (Hidayat & Kuswanto, 2024). Such approaches support students in navigating differences constructively.

Multicultural schools present unique moral challenges for students. Daily interactions require continuous negotiation of values and perspectives. Environmental influences, including family background and peer groups, shape moral responses. Digital exposure further complicates students' ethical decision-making. Moral confusion may arise when value systems conflict. Schools must therefore provide guidance that helps students develop moral clarity.

Moral development cannot be confined to cognitive understanding alone. Knowledge of moral principles does not automatically lead to ethical behavior. Emotional engagement plays a critical role in shaping moral awareness. Practical experience reinforces moral habits through consistent action. Empathy, social responsibility, and cooperation emerge through lived interaction. Moral education must integrate affective and behavioral dimensions.

Islamic teachings offer a comprehensive framework for moral formation in diverse contexts. Values of brotherhood, justice, and respect for humanity are central principles. Diversity is acknowledged as a natural condition of social life. Moral guidance emphasizes coexistence and peaceful interaction. Such values are particularly relevant in multicultural school settings. Islamic Religious Education thus holds significant potential for inclusive moral development (Purnomo, 2019).

Teachers of Islamic Religious Education occupy a vital position in moral guidance. Their role extends beyond instructional duties. Personal example serves as a powerful moral influence for students. Classroom interaction reflects the ethical stance demonstrated by teachers. An inclusive learning atmosphere encourages mutual respect. Teachers function as moral role models within the school community. Instructional strategies significantly influence the effectiveness of moral education. Dialogical approaches encourage students to reflect on ethical issues. Interactive learning promotes openness to diverse viewpoints. Respectful discussion helps students develop moral reasoning skills. Adaptive teaching strategies respond to students' cultural and social backgrounds. Such methods strengthen moral intelligence within multicultural classrooms.

Moral intelligence enables students to make ethical decisions in complex situations. This competence is increasingly important in diverse educational settings. Exposure to difference requires moral sensitivity and self-regulation. Islamic Religious Education supports the development of these capacities. Moral reflection is embedded within religious instruction. Students gradually learn to align values with behavior. Based on these considerations, this study examines the role of Islamic Religious Education in fostering students' moral development within multicultural schools. Attention is given to instructional strategies employed by teachers. Challenges encountered in moral guidance are explored systematically. Opportunities for strengthening moral education are also identified. The study addresses both theoretical and practical dimensions. Its focus aligns with contemporary educational needs (Fathurrochman, 2017).

The findings of this research are expected to contribute to educational theory and practice. Moral development through Islamic Religious Education may be enhanced through adaptive models. Multicultural school contexts require flexible and inclusive approaches. Insights from this study may inform curriculum development. The may benefit from evidence-based strategies for moral guidance. Ultimately, the research aims to support harmonious within diverse school communities.

## Method

This section describes how the research was conducted. The primary materials of this section are (1) research design; (2) population and sample (target of research); (3) data collection techniques and instrument development; (4) and data analysis techniques. For research using tools and materials, it is necessary to write down the specifications of the tools and materials. The tool specifications describe the sophistication of the tools used, while the material specifications describe the types of materials used. Qualitative research such as classroom action research, ethnography, phenomenology, case studies, and others, it is necessary to add the presence of researchers, research subjects, informants who helped during the research and ways to explore research data, location and duration of research as well as descriptions of checking the validity of research results.

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in shaping the moral character of Generation Z in the digital era. This approach was selected because it allows for a holistic and contextual description of phenomena based on experiences, interpretations, and dynamics occurring within educational settings. Qualitative research also enables a deeper exploration of students' moral behavior and the character-building strategies implemented by IRE teachers (Creswell, 2018).

The research subjects consisted of IRE teachers, Generation Z students, and other educators relevant to the implementation of Islamic Religious Education. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that involves choosing data sources based on research objectives and specific considerations such as competence, experience, and involvement in moral development activities at school (Sugiyono, 2021). This technique was considered appropriate because the study emphasized the depth and richness of information rather than the number of participants.

Research data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to obtain information regarding teachers' and students' understanding of IRE-based moral development. Participatory observation was used to examine IRE learning practices, student interactions, and the implementation of moral values in daily school life. Document analysis involved reviewing relevant materials such as the IRE curriculum, instructional plans, school policies, and other supporting documents. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and methodological triangulation, which involved comparing data from multiple informants and examining the consistency of information obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation simultaneously (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2019). This strategy was applied to ensure the accuracy, reliability, and credibility of the research findings.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by selecting and focusing on essential information in accordance with the research themes. Data were then presented in systematic narrative forms to facilitate understanding. The final stage involved drawing conclusions continuously throughout the research process until valid and accountable findings were achieved.

## Results & Discussion

This study aimed to describe the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in fostering moral development within a multicultural school environment. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with six Generation Z informants, consisting of students, IRE teachers, non-IRE teachers, and student council administrators, as well as through systematic observations of the school environment. The findings indicate that religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity in multicultural schools' influences students' interaction patterns, acceptance of differences, and overall moral formation. Diversity functions as a significant contextual factor shaping students' moral attitudes and behaviors in daily school life.

The results reveal that Islamic Religious Education plays three main roles in students' moral development within a multicultural school context: (1) educational, (2) preventive, and (3) integrative roles. The detailed findings are presented as follows.

### 1. Educational Role of Islamic Religious Education in Moral Development

IRE teachers provide moral guidance through moral instruction (akhlaq), role modeling, and habituation practices within the school environment. Based on interview data, students stated that IRE learning materials contributed to the development of mutual respect, care, and honesty. To measure students' moral attitude tendencies, the researcher developed a simple assessment instrument, which produced the following results.

**Table 1. Students' Moral Attitude Scores in a Multicultural School Environment**

Moral Aspect	Average Score	Category
Tolerance	82	Good
Honesty	78	Good
Discipline	74	Fairly Good
Care	81	Good
Cooperation	85	Very Good

The findings show that cooperation was the most dominant moral aspect, with an average score of 85, followed by tolerance with a score of 82. These results indicate that diversity within the school environment provides opportunities for students to develop positive intercultural interactions. Multicultural conditions appear to encourage collaboration rather than division among students.

### 2. Preventive Role of Islamic Religious Education in Reducing Student Conflict

IRE teachers also play a preventive role in minimizing conflicts arising from differences in students' cultural backgrounds and habits. Moral guidance is carried out through classroom dialogue, moral advice, and informal counseling. The effectiveness of this preventive role is reflected in the data presented below.

**Table 2. Frequency of Student Moral Violations Before and After IRE-Based Moral Guidance**

Type of Violation	Before Guidance	After Guidance
Bullying	12 cases	4 cases
Minor conflicts	18 cases	7 cases
Indiscipline	25 cases	11 cases
Bullying	12 cases	4 cases

As shown in Table 2, all types of moral violations experienced a significant decrease after the implementation of IRE-based moral development programs. Activities such as short religious talks (kultum), habituation of congregational prayers, and Friday reflection sessions were found to contribute to reducing student conflict and improving moral awareness.

### **3. Integrative Role: Collaboration Between IRE and School Culture**

The study also found that moral development becomes more effective when IRE teachers collaborate with other subject teachers and student council administrators. Several integrative programs were identified, including: (1) the Morning Greeting Movement led by IRE teachers and involving all teachers, (2) the Multicultural Friendship Program, which integrates Islamic values with universal principles such as respect for diversity, and (3) cross-subject moral discussions, for example collaboration between IRE and social studies teachers in discussing tolerance and social harmony. Observational findings indicate that such collaboration enhances students' sense of safety, mutual respect, and emotional closeness. Moral values are consistently reinforced across academic and non-academic activities, strengthening the overall moral climate of the school.

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a strategic role in fostering moral development within multicultural school environments. This finding is consistent with Lickona's (2012) moral education theory, which emphasizes that character formation is achieved through the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. These three components were clearly reflected in the moral development practices implemented by IRE teachers in schools characterized by diverse student backgrounds. Moral education in this context extended beyond theoretical instruction and was embedded in students' everyday social experiences. As a result, moral development emerged as a dynamic and contextual process shaped by diversity.

#### **a. Moral Knowing**

With regard to moral knowing, the results show that students demonstrated an understanding of fundamental Islamic moral values, including tolerance (*tasamuh*), mutual respect, politeness, responsibility, and the importance of avoiding behaviors that harm others. This understanding was developed through moral instruction delivered in IRE subjects, value-oriented classroom discussions, and reinforcement of relevant Qur'anic verses and hadiths (Alqudsi et al., 2023). The multicultural school environment enhanced the contextual relevance of lessons on tolerance and respect for differences, making these values easier for students to comprehend and internalize. Cognitive moral development was therefore strengthened through the integration of instructional content and social realities within the school setting.

#### **b. Moral Feeling**

The second component, moral feeling, was reflected in the development of students' moral sensitivity, attitudes, and emotional awareness. Interview and observation data indicate that religious habituation practices, such as congregational prayers, dhikr, short religious talks (kultum), and other religious programs, fostered a religious atmosphere conducive to the growth of empathy, self-awareness, and respect for others. Positive interactions among students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds further promoted care, solidarity, and acceptance of plurality. These findings reinforce Lickona's view that character formation cannot rely solely on moral instruction but requires

emotional and social experiences that enable students to genuinely experience moral values (Ikhwan, 2019).

### **c. Moral Action**

In terms of moral action, the findings reveal that students were able to apply moral values in their daily behavior. This was evidenced by increased cross-cultural cooperation, improved self-restraint in conflict situations, and a decline in moral violations, as shown in Table 2. Reductions in bullying, minor conflicts, and disciplinary problems indicate that moral values were not only understood and felt but also practiced consistently. Islamic Religious Education therefore facilitated the internalization of moral values that translated into observable behavior, aligning with Lickona's concept of moral behavior.

### **d. Moral Development from a Multicultural Education Perspective**

These findings also support Banks' (2016) theory of multicultural education, which argues that moral education in diverse school settings is effective only when teachers adopt inclusive attitudes, cultural values are respected, and all components of the school community are involved. IRE teachers in this study demonstrated inclusivity through humanistic approaches, nondiscriminatory communication, and efforts to understand students' diverse backgrounds. Moral development programs were designed with sensitivity to cultural diversity, ensuring that moral values were framed as universal and shared rather than exclusive. Collaboration among IRE teachers, subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and student organizations further reinforced a consistent and supportive moral climate across the school.

### **e. IRE Teachers as Role Models and Agents of Moral Change**

The study also highlights the role of IRE teachers as moral role models and agents of change. Teachers' exemplary behavior in communication, attitudes, and conflict resolution served as a reference for students when interacting with peers from different cultural backgrounds. This finding aligns with modeling theory in educational psychology, which suggests that moral behavior is more effectively learned through concrete examples than through verbal instruction alone. Programs such as *kultum*, informal counseling, religious habituation, and moral dialogue provided students with opportunities to reflect on the importance of respecting differences and living harmoniously within the school community.

### **f. Moral Development Beyond Rules and Sanctions**

The decline in moral violations, as presented in Table 2, reflects a significant shift in students' moral attitudes and behaviors. This finding supports the view that moral development cannot rely solely on rules and punitive measures. While regulations are necessary, they are insufficient as the primary strategy for character formation. Effective moral education should focus on developing internal value systems rather than mere compliance with external rules. Persuasive, dialogical, and exemplary approaches were found to exert a deeper influence on students' moral development than repressive disciplinary methods. Overall, Islamic Religious Education in multicultural school environments plays a holistic role by strengthening moral understanding, cultivating moral sensitivity, and encouraging moral action. This comprehensive process provides a strong foundation for the character development of younger generations in increasingly pluralistic and complex societies (Indarwati, 2020).

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education plays a comprehensive and strategic role in fostering students' moral development within multicultural school environments. Through the integrated processes of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, Islamic values are not only transmitted cognitively but also internalized emotionally and practiced behaviorally in students' daily interactions. The multicultural context strengthens the relevance of moral education by providing real-life situations that encourage tolerance, cooperation, and mutual respect. The findings also highlight the importance of inclusive teacher attitudes, respect for cultural diversity, and collaborative school culture in sustaining effective moral development. Islamic Religious Education therefore functions not merely as a religious subject but as a moral framework that supports character formation and social harmony. Such an approach is essential for preparing Generation Z to navigate ethical challenges in increasingly pluralistic societies.

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