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Reconstructing Gen-Z Character through Tauhid and Ibn Khaldun's Ashabiyah: Toward Social Cohesion in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z (Gen-Z) faces a character crisis in the digital era, marked by moral decline, dependence on social validation, and weakening social cohesion. This study aims to reconstruct a Gen-Z character by integrating Tauhid as a spiritual foundation and Ibn Khaldun's concept of Ashabiyah as a social force. Previous studies discussed Tauhid and Ashabiyah separately, but no study has integrated both as a holistic paradigm for character reconstruction in the digital era. This research employs a qualitative method through library research and content analysis. The findings show that the crisis is caused not only by technological disruption but also by weak internalisation of value and declining social solidarity. Tauhid develops responsible, resilient, moral, and independent individuals through Muraqabah and Izzah, while Ashabiyah strengthens social cohesion and collective resilience based on religious values (ad-din). Their integration produces four stages of character formation: Bashir, Qalb, Fana-Baqa, and Malakah. This study also finds that the Tafakur and Tadabur methods are effective in integrating science, technology, and spiritual values. Tafakur encourages reflective thinking based on revelation, while Tadabur emphasises ethical awareness and the purpose of human activities. This study offers a holistic paradigm for Gen-Z character education that integrates spiritual morality, social cohesion, and epistemological reconstruction to address digital challenges.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of globalisation and digital disruption has brought significant implications for the formation of the character of Generation Z (Gen Z). This generation lives in a very intense digital ecosystem, so they are not only users of technology but also objects of algorithms that shape their mindset, behaviour, and life orientation. Phenomena such as dependence on social validation, consumptive behaviour, reduced deep-thinking

skills, and identity crises indicate serious character degradation. In this context, Gen-Z faces multidimensional challenges, ranging from moral and social to epistemological aspects. On the other hand, demographically, Gen-Z is the dominant group that will determine the future direction of the Indonesian nation. The large Gen-Z population, which accounts for almost 28% of Indonesia's total population, makes them strategic actors in the development of civilisation. However, this great potential has not been balanced with a solid foundation of character, especially in the face of secularisation, digital hedonism, and social fragmentation. This shows that there is a gap between the demographic potential and the readiness of the younger generation's character. Based on these conditions, the main problems in this study are: (1) how the degradation of Gen-Z characters is formed in the contemporary digital ecosystem; (2) why the existing character education approach has not been able to answer moral and social crises comprehensively; and (3) how to formulate a character reconstruction model that can integrate the spiritual (Tauhid) and social (Ashabiyah) dimensions systemically. This problem is important to study because character crises not only affect individuals but also social resilience and the sustainability of the nation's civilisation.

A review of the relevant literature on Gen-Z from a sociological and educational perspective shows that this generation has unique characteristics as a "phygital generation", which is a blend of the physical and digital worlds [1]. Other research highlights Gen-Z's increasing reliance on social validation and digital media, which impacts mental health and self-identity [2]. Meanwhile, the study by Szymkowiak et al. [3] confirms that technology plays a dominant role in shaping the behaviour and learning patterns of the younger generation in the digital era. From an Islamic perspective, the concept of Tauhid has been widely studied as the moral and spiritual foundation of individuals [4], [5]. Tauhid is not only understood as a theological doctrine, but also as a value system that shapes the integrity, ethics, and orientation of human life [7]. Al-Ghazali emphasised that internalised Tauhid will give birth to morality as a sedentary character (khuluq). However, most research still focuses on the individual-spiritual dimension and has not yet linked it to contemporary social dynamics.

On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun's Ashabiyah theory has been used as an analytical framework in understanding social solidarity and the dynamics of civilisation [8]. Ashabiyah is seen as a collective force that determines the rise and fall of a civilisation [9]. However, this study has generally not been contextualised in the reality of the digital generation, such as Gen Z. Thus, there is a significant literary gap: the lack of integration between the concept of Tauhid as a spiritual foundation and Ashabiyah as a social force in shaping the character of the digital generation [10].

The approach and solutions proposed in an integrative framework based on Islamic sociology, synthesising the concepts of Tawheed and Ashabiyah, as a framework for the reconstruction of Gen-Z characters. Tauhid is positioned as an epistemological and moral foundation that shapes individual consciousness (self-agency) [11], while Ashabiyah functions as a collective energy that strengthens social solidarity. The integration of the two is expected to create a balance between internal (spirituality) and external (social cohesion) forces. Operationally, this approach is realised through the internalisation of the value of Tauhid (fixed character) through habituation mechanisms, as well as through strengthening

social solidarity based on religious values (ad-din) as an organic form of Ashabiyah. In addition, this study also proposes Tafakur and Tadabur-based educational methods as an epistemological strategy to integrate science, technology, and divine values. This approach aims not only to form spiritually godly individuals but also to cultivate productivity, innovation, and social responsibility. The novelty value of this research lies in the conceptual integration between Tauhid and Ashabiyah in the context of the reconstruction of Gen-Z characters in the digital era [12].

In contrast to previous research, which tended to be partial, emphasising only spiritual and social aspects, this research offers a holistic paradigm that simultaneously combines theological and sociological dimensions. This integration resulted in a new model in character education based on the "Tauhid-Ashabiyah Framework". In addition, this research presents innovations by transforming classical concepts (Tauhid and Ashabiyah) for the contemporary context of the digital society, especially in addressing algorithmic phenomena, technological disruptions, and Gen-Z identity crises. The concept of internalising values into Malakah as an automatic character habitus is also a theoretical contribution that enriches the study of modern Islamic education. Thus, this research not only contributes to the development of theories in Islamic education and sociology but also provides practical implications for designing relevant Gen-Z character development models to foster social cohesion in the digital era.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical library research design. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to understand, interpret, and reconstruct the concept of the Generation Z character by integrating the values of Tauhid and the theory of Ashabiyah by Ibn Khaldun in depth and context. According to Creswell and Clark [13], this research is effectively used to explore social phenomena and to construct meaning from theoretical and contextual perspectives.

The research design adopts a conceptual-analytical approach that integrates philosophical and sociological perspectives. The philosophical approach is used to examine the concept of Tauhid as a theological foundation in character formation. In contrast, the sociological approach is used to analyse the Ashabiyah theory in the context of Gen-Z's social dynamics in the digital age.

Thus, this design is relevant to a model of character reconstruction based on value integration and serves as a new paradigm for the formation of Gen-Z characters that are adaptive to the digital age yet rooted in Islamic spiritual and social values. This approach helps in constructing an integrative narrative between Tauhid and Ashabiyah in the context of Gen-Z.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The results of this study show that reconstructing the character of Generation Z (Gen-Z) in the era of digital disruption requires an integrative approach that combines spiritual (Tauhid) and social (Ashabiyah) dimensions. Based on the analysis of the literature and

conceptual synthesis, it was found that the character degradation of Gen-Z is caused not only by external factors such as technology and globalisation, but also by the weak internalisation of fundamental values in individuals [14]. Therefore, character reconstruction must be carried out through the transformation of values into (fixed characters) that are embedded sustainably [15].

a. Transformation of Gen-Z Character through the Internalisation of Tauhid Values

Tauhid plays a central role in shaping Gen-Z characters with integrity [7]. The internalisation of the value of Tauhid does not stop at the cognitive level; it develops into a multidimensional consciousness encompassing intellectual, social, and spiritual aspects [16]. This process gradually progresses from formal to intuitive awareness until it reaches a fixed character [17].

Findings state that Tauhid has transformative implications in shaping the orientation of human life; the research confirms that Tauhid is the basis of moral and moral integrity [18]. In the context of Gen-Z, the internalisation of Tauhid has proven able to restore individuals' position from "algorithmic objects" to "sovereign subjects", namely individuals with self-agency and resilience in the face of digitalisation.

b. Formation of Mental Toughness through the Value of Tauhid (Muraqabah and Izzah)

This study found that the value of Tauhid, internalised as Muraqabah (awareness of God's supervision) and Izzah (self-glory) [19], plays a significant role in shaping Gen-Z's mental toughness. These results are supported by international research showing that spiritual awareness is positively correlated with psychological resilience and well-being among younger generations [20].

c. Reconstruction of Gen-Z Epistemology through the Tafakur and Tadabur Methods

The Tafakur and Tadabur methods were found to be an effective approach in integrating science, technology, and spiritual values [21]. Tafakur functions as a process of revelation-based scientific reflection [22], while Tadabur directs to the ethical and objective dimensions (maqashid) of every human activity [23].

These findings align with Chowdhury's [24] research, which emphasises the importance of integrating science and religion in education to address moral decadence among the younger generation. In a global context, the integration between spirituality and science is also recognised as an important approach in building the character of the 21st century [25], [26], [27], [28].

d. Strengthening Social Solidarity through the Concept of Ashabiyah

Ashabiyah, grounded in religious values (ad-din), has proven able to build strong, sustainable social cohesion rather than solidarity based on interests or narrow identities. The research by Hasibuan et al. [29] and Luhtitianti and Arifin [30] supports this finding, stating that Ashabiyah theory is relevant for understanding the dynamics of modern Muslim society. Meanwhile, from an international perspective, the concept of social cohesion has proven to be a key factor in the success of development and social resilience [31], [32].

e. Gen-Z Character Reconstruction Model Based on Tauhid and Ashabiyah

Model of Gen-Z character reconstruction based on the integration of Tauhid and Ashabiyah [33], [34], [35] consists of four levels of transformation:

1. Bashar Level (Formal Awareness): Tauhid as the basis for digital literacy and ethics
2. Intuitive Level (Heart Awareness): internalisation of Muraqabah and Izzah as character filters
3. Transcendental Level (Fana-Baqa): a life orientation based on devotion and public welfare
4. Malakah Level (Permanent Character): the formation of an automatic and sustainable character habitus

This demonstrates that character reconstruction is not instantaneous, but rather a gradual process involving habituation, spiritual awareness, and social reinforcement. These findings reinforce the concept of khuluq in Al-Ghazali's thought and in Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus, which emphasises the importance of habituation in character formation.

3.2. Discussion

a. Digital Crisis Interpretation

The Gen-Z character crisis cannot be understood in isolation, but rather as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing epistemological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects. The finding that Gen-Z tends to be "algorithmic objects" suggests an ontological shift from humans as subjects to entities controlled by digital systems. From the perspective of modernity theory, this condition aligns with Shoshana Zuboff's concept of surveillance capitalism, in which human behaviour is constructed through mechanisms of technology and data [36], [37], [38]. Thus, the reconstruction of character cannot be carried out through conventional pedagogical approaches but requires a philosophical foundation capable of restoring human sovereignty as a subject.

b. Tauhid Contribution

The concept of Tauhid makes a significant contribution as an integrative *worldview*. This awareness that humans are creations of Allah, while Allah is the Creator, helps humans rediscover themselves as responsible subject entrusted by Allah. Tauhid is not only a theological doctrine but also an epistemological framework that unifies the dimensions of science, morality, and the purpose of life. Tauhid as the Foundation of Character Reconstruction. Internalisation forms spiritually grounded and psychologically resilient individuals who are not dependent on external validation in the digital era.

The study's findings show that the internalisation of Tauhid can restore Gen-Z's self-agency, which was previously reduced by the dominance of digital algorithms. This aligns with Al-Attas's thinking, which emphasises the importance of integrating knowledge and divine values to overcome the crisis of "loss of adab" in modern society [39], [40]. In international studies, the concept of spiritual intelligence has also been shown to play an important role in shaping individuals' meaning in life and resilience amid the complexity of modernity [41], [42].

The internalisation of the values of Muraqabah and Izzah in the context of modern psychology, awareness of God's presence (Muraqabah), can be understood as a form of meta-awareness that enhances self-control and emotion regulation. Meanwhile, the concept of Izzah serves as an intrinsic source of self-esteem that does not depend on external validation. This is relevant to research in international journals that shows that individuals with an intrinsic orientation (internal locus of control) have a higher level of resilience than those who rely on external validation [43]. Thus, the integration of Tauhid values is not only theologically relevant but also has empirical implications in psychology and education.

c. Ashabiyah Contribution

The integration of Ashabiyah, as conceptualised by Ibn Khaldun, in the context of a digital society. The findings suggest that Gen-Z's weak social solidarity stems from digital individualism and transactional social relations. In Ibn Khaldun's perspective, this condition resembles the phase of civilisation's decline (hadhari), in which luxury and comfort weaken collective solidarity. This analysis aligns with Putnam's [44] theory of social capital, which holds that declining social cohesion weakens the quality of democracy and social development. Therefore, strengthening Ashabiyah based on religious values (akhlak al-karimah) is an important strategy for rebuilding organic solidarity amid social fragmentation. Ashabiyah becomes a collective force that strengthens Gen-Z solidarity and social responsibility amid digital individualism; it directs digital communities toward ethical and civilisation-oriented movements rooted in ad-din

d. The integration between Tauhid and Ashabiyah

This study results in a model that is not only normative but also operational, through four transformative stages: Bashar (rational consciousness), Qolb (spiritual awareness), Fana- Baqa (transcendental maturity), and Malakah (permanent character formation). The model confirms that strong character is formed gradually through continuous internalisation and habituation of values. Furthermore, the concepts of Malakah in Ibnu Khaldun and khuluq in al-Ghazali emphasise that true character is not merely knowledge but embodied habit. This model can also be attributed to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus, which emphasises that social practices are formed through the internalisation of repetitive structures [45].

e. Reconstructing Gen-Z Characters through Holistic Education

From an educational perspective, this study has important implications for transforming learning methods. The proposed Tafakur and Tadabur approaches serve not only as reflective methods but also as alternative epistemologies that integrate science and revelation. This aligns with global trends in education that emphasise holistic education and the integration of values in 21st-century learning [46]. Research by Aryani et al. [47] also shows that integrating science and religion is effective in addressing the moral decadence among the younger generation. Thus, the Tauhid-based education model is not contrary to modernity, but rather a solution to the crisis of modernity itself.

Furthermore, this research expands the discourse on civilisational development by positioning Gen-Z as the primary actor in fostering social cohesion in the digital era [48].

The findings that Tauhid- and Ashabiyah-based characters can produce a spiritually resilient and socially cohesive generation show that development depends not only on economic and technological factors but also on moral qualities and social cohesion. This aligns with the theory of human development, which emphasises the importance of human values, ethics, and capacity as the main factors of progress [49].

Overall, this discussion emphasises that the integration of Tauhid and Ashabiyah is not merely a normative concept but an alternative paradigm for addressing character crises in the digital era.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it can be concluded that the character crisis of Generation Z (Gen-Z) in the era of digital disruption is a multidimensional phenomenon that is not only influenced by technological developments, but also by the weak internalisation of fundamental values in individuals and the weakening of social cohesion. This study found that: a). Tauhid develops responsible, resilient, moral, and independent individuals through Muraqabah and Izzah. b). Ashabiyah strengthens social cohesion and collective resilience based on religious values (ad-din). c). Their integration produces four stages of character formation: Bashar, Qolb, Fana-Baqa, and Malakah. d). This study also finds that the Tafakur and Tadabur methods are effective in integrating science, technology, and spiritual values. Tafakur encourages reflective thinking based on revelation, while Tadabur emphasises ethical awareness and the purpose of human activities.

The main novelty of this research is the integration of Tauhid and Ashabiyah as a holistic paradigm for reconstructing Gen-Z character through spiritual morality (Tauhid), social cohesion, and collective resilience in the digital era, grounded in religious values (ad-din).

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