

RESEARCH

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Fostering Honesty among Generation Z Students: A Multiple-Case Study of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Pidie

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Abstract

This study explores the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to foster honesty among Generation Z students in senior high schools in Pidie Regency, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative multi-site case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation at three public senior high schools. The findings identify five strategies: role modeling (*uswah hasanah*), habituation, dialogic approaches, spiritual reinforcement, and digital media utilization. Role modeling emerged as the most prominent strategy, as teachers' consistency between words and actions was perceived to strengthen students' trust and willingness to emulate honest behavior. Observed and reported changes associated with these practices included greater moral awareness, reduced cheating, increased responsibility, greater willingness to acknowledge mistakes, and more open teacher student relationships. Teachers and students also perceived these practices as supporting learning motivation, discipline, confidence, and positive social interactions. Digital media provided opportunities to communicate moral messages through formats familiar to Generation Z, although its use required appropriate supervision. The study contributes a contextual framework linking PAI teacher strategies, value internalization, Generation Z characteristics, and digital media. Given its qualitative design, findings are contextually bounded and do not establish causal effects or generalized improvements in academic achievement.

Keywords: Honesty Education; Islamic Character Education; Role Modeling; Digital Pedagogy; Generation Z; Islamic Religious Education

Introduction

The education sector currently faces serious challenges specifically a crisis of integrity and a degradation of character among the younger generation stemming from the rapid advancement of digital technology, social media, and the forces of globalization. Phenomena such as the spread of hoaxes, plagiarism, tech-enabled academic dishonesty, cyberbullying, information manipulation, and eroding social trust demonstrate that the issue of honesty has become a universal concern in education (Rensfeldt & Rahm, 2023; Ali, 2020; Cheng & Carolyn Yang, 2023). International organizations emphasize that 21st-century education focuses not only on mastering academic competencies but also on reinforcing character values, integrity, and responsibility as the foundation for a sustainable society (Mirza & Wahyudi, 2025; La Ode Bunga Ali & Musliem, 2024).

In this context, fostering the value of honesty among Generation Z has become a strategic priority in many countries, including Indonesia; consequently, teachers particularly Islamic Religious Education teachers play a crucial role in developing instructional strategies capable of contextualizing and internalizing the value of honesty amidst the challenges of the digital era.

Although character education and honesty are integral to educational goals, concerns about adolescent risk behaviors remain relevant in Aceh. Recent official and law-enforcement initiatives in the region have specifically targeted drug prevention, bullying, juvenile delinquency, and other risks affecting students (Surahman et al., 2023; Fathurrochman et al., 2020). The Police of Pidie Jaya, for example, has emphasized the prevention of drug abuse, bullying, and juvenile delinquency among students through school-based community-safety programs. At the provincial level, the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) of Aceh also identifies students and young people as important targets of drug-prevention and education programs. These concerns, however, should not be interpreted as direct evidence of an honesty crisis among students. Rather, they provide a broader local context in which schools face challenges in strengthening students' responsibility, self-control, and moral decision-making (Karlina, 2020). In this context, an empirical examination of how Islamic Religious Education teachers foster and internalize honesty among Generation Z students is warranted. The present study therefore focuses specifically on three public senior high schools in Pidie Regency to examine teachers' strategies, classroom practices, and contextual factors involved in cultivating honesty.

Previous studies have examined character education, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) strategies, honesty, and digital learning from different but largely separate perspectives. Research on character education has emphasized the development of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, highlighting the importance of teachers as moral models and of habituation in shaping students' character (Kurniawan & Fitriyani, 2023). Within Islamic education, studies have similarly emphasized *uswah hasanah*, habituation, religious guidance, and value internalization as important mechanisms for character formation (Wien Khakleri et al, 2025; Asrin, 2024). However, these studies primarily address character or noble morality as a broad construct rather than honesty as a specific behavioral outcome. Other studies have examined Islamic Religious Education in relation to Generation Z and digitalization, emphasizing the need for teachers to adapt instructional strategies and digital media to students' technological characteristics (Jamaluddin, 2026; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2025). Meanwhile, studies on Islamic character education have addressed specific issues such as bullying prevention, noble character, and local-value-based character formation (Zainudin et al., 2025; Islamic et al., 2024; Sahri, 2025; Aisah & Handayani, 2025; Latipah et al., 2025). Taken together, these studies demonstrate substantial knowledge on character education, Islamic instructional strategies, and digital learning, but they remain differentiated in construct, setting, and analytical focus. Specifically, the reviewed literature does not yet provide an integrated framework that simultaneously examines honesty as the focal character value, Generation Z as the learner context, PAI teachers' strategies as the pedagogical mechanism, digital media as part of the instructional environment, and the observed or perceived changes associated with honesty development in senior high schools. This gap is particularly evident in the limited attention to how these elements interact within a specific socio-cultural setting. Therefore, this study addresses this gap through a qualitative multi-site case study of three public senior high schools in Pidie Regency, examining teachers' strategies, instructional methods and media, supporting and inhibiting factors, and observed and reported changes related to students' honesty.

This study offers a novel approach to developing strategies for fostering honesty among Generation Z students through an Islamic Religious Education framework that integrates the

characteristics of the digital generation with the process of internalizing Islamic values. Unlike previous studies that generally examined character building or the cultivation of noble character (*akhlak al-karimah*) in a broad sense (Khasanah, 2023; Winnuly et al., 2024; Rahmani, 2026). This research specifically focuses on honesty as a core character trait, analyzing it across four key dimensions: the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers; the use of teaching methods and media; the factors supporting or hindering this process; and the impact on the behavior of Generation Z students. Furthermore, this study developed a conceptual model for fostering honesty tailored to the characteristics of students in the digital era and the socio-cultural context of Pidie Regency thereby enriching the study of Islamic character education while offering an alternative model for cultivating honesty that is more contextual, applicable, and relevant to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in high schools.

This research contributes to the development of Islamic educational theory specifically within the study of character education by strengthening the concept of fostering honesty among Generation Z. It expands upon character education theory, which has traditionally focused on normative aspects, by proposing an integration of Islamic value internalization theory, character education, and the characteristics of Generation Z in the digital era. Furthermore, this study produces a conceptual framework that explains the relationships among Islamic Religious Education teachers' strategies, instructional methods and media, supporting and inhibiting factors, and their impact on fostering honesty in students, thereby enriching the body of knowledge in Islamic education and character education.

This study offers practical contributions in the form of recommended strategies for fostering honesty strategies that can be implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers during the learning process in high schools. The research findings can serve as a reference for teachers in selecting learning strategies, methods, and media suited to the characteristics of Generation Z, while also providing a basis for consideration by school principals and policymakers when designing character education strengthening programs grounded in Islamic values. Furthermore, the resulting guidance model is expected to strengthen collaboration among schools, families, and the community in fostering a culture of honesty, integrity, and responsibility among students in the digital era.

This study makes a methodological contribution by developing an analysis that integrates various data sources such as in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive overview of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers' strategies in fostering honesty among Generation Z students. This approach enables the development of an analytical model linking learning strategies, the process of value internalization, and factors influencing the success of character development. Consequently, this study can serve as a methodological reference for future research on Islamic character education particularly regarding the cultivation of honesty among Generation Z within the context of formal education.

Method

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to develop an in-depth understanding of how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers foster honesty among Generation Z students across three public senior high schools in Pidie Regency, Indonesia. The three schools were treated as three bounded cases within a multiple-case design rather than as a single undifferentiated case. Each school constituted one case, bounded by its institutional setting, PAI teaching practices, student participants, character-building programs, and the period of data collection. The primary unit of analysis was the strategy and practice of PAI teachers in fostering and internalizing honesty

among students, while school-level contextual factors were examined as supporting or constraining conditions. A multiple-case design was selected to enable within-case analysis followed by cross-case comparison, allowing recurring patterns and context-specific variations to be identified across the three schools. SMA Negeri 1 Tangse, SMA Negeri 1 Padang Tiji, and SMA Negeri 1 Kembang Tanjong were purposively selected because all three are public senior high schools in Pidie Regency, implement character-building activities involving Islamic values, and provided access to relevant PAI teachers, school administrators, students, and documentary sources. Their shared institutional level, educational context, and focus on character development provided an analytically comparable basis for cross-case analysis, while differences in school context allowed the study to identify both common and context-specific strategies.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Thirty-three participants were purposively selected from three public senior high schools: six PAI teachers, three principals, six BK teachers, and 18 students, with 11 participants from each school. Interviews explored participants' experiences and perceptions of strategies for fostering honesty. Documents included lesson plans, teaching modules, activity records, student-infraction records, religious programs, and character-development reports and were used to corroborate interview and observation findings (Creswell, et al, 2018).

Twelve observation sessions were conducted, four at each school, with each session lasting 30 minutes (360 minutes in total). Observations focused on teacher-student interactions, exemplary behavior, student responses, honesty-related practices, and relevant classroom or school activities. Using an observation protocol, the researcher maintained a non-interventionist role and recorded descriptive and reflective field notes during or immediately after each session. Consistent procedures and multiple observation occasions were used to reduce reactivity, while observations were triangulated with interview and documentary evidence.

Data analysis employed the Miles and Huberman (2014) interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data were coded and organized to identify recurring themes related to PAI teachers' strategies for fostering honesty. Data adequacy was assessed through thematic saturation within each school and stakeholder group. Saturation was considered reached when successive interviews and observations produced no substantively new codes, themes, or explanations relevant to the research questions, but primarily confirmed existing findings (Dejenu & Debela, 2022). This assessment was conducted iteratively during data collection and cross-case comparison and informed the final sample of 33 participants across the three schools. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation (PAI teachers, principals, BK teachers, and students), method triangulation (interviews, observations, and documents), and time triangulation.

The relative prominence of the identified strategies was determined through qualitative analytic salience rather than numerical frequency or participant ranking. A strategy was considered prominent when it demonstrated consistent evidence across the three research sites, converged across multiple data sources, particularly interviews, participant observations, and school documentation, and repeatedly emerged as a central explanation of honesty-fostering practices among participants. Based on these criteria, role modeling (*uswah hasanah*) was considered the most prominent strategy because evidence of teachers' exemplary behavior was consistently identified across all three schools and was supported by interview accounts, classroom and school observations, and documentary evidence. The analysis did not assign numerical weights or statistical rankings to the five strategies.

Results

Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Exemplary Behavior as the Most Prominent Strategy in Internalizing Honesty among Generation Z Students

The findings identified role modeling (*uswah hasanah*) as the most prominent strategy across the three participating schools. This prominence was determined from its consistent occurrence across the three sites and convergence among interview, observation, and documentary evidence. Interview participants reported that students were more likely to trust and emulate teachers who consistently demonstrated honesty, discipline, fairness, and responsibility. A PAI teacher from SMA Negeri 1 Tangse stated that students tend to pay greater attention to teachers' actual behavior than to verbal advice, particularly when teachers' actions are consistent with their messages. PAI teachers from SMA Negeri 1 Padang Tiji and SMA Negeri 1 Kembang Tanjong similarly reported that exemplary conduct was an important part of their approach to teaching Islamic values.

Observational data showed several forms of teacher role modeling, including punctuality, objective assessment, consistency between words and actions, and direct responses to academic dishonesty such as cheating. During the observed PAI lessons and school activities, teachers were also seen reminding students about responsible and honest behavior. Documentary evidence showed that the three schools had rules of conduct, student codes of ethics, and character-building programs that included honesty-related values. Moral messages concerning honesty were also displayed in several school environments. Across the three cases, these three sources showed convergent evidence of teachers' exemplary conduct and institutional provisions related to honesty. The findings therefore describe role modeling as a prominent practice within the observed school contexts, without establishing its causal effectiveness or measurable impact on students' honesty.

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of fostering honesty among Generation Z students is heavily influenced by the teacher's moral credibility as a role model. Having grown up in a digital environment, Generation Z tends to evaluate the authenticity of a person's behavior; consequently, they are more responsive to concrete examples than to the normative presentation of concepts. Therefore, the success of an Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher's strategy lies in their ability to cultivate personal integrity that is reflected in their daily behavior. This finding reinforces Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which explains that individuals learn behavior through processes of observation, imitation, and modeling of figures perceived to hold authority. On the other hand, the findings of this study reinforce the concept of *uswah hasanah* (exemplary conduct) in Islamic education, which positions the teacher as both an educator (*murabbi*) and a moral role model in shaping students' character. Thus, the study affirms that the strategy of leading by example serves not merely as a teaching method but as a mechanism for internalizing the value of honesty one capable of fostering students' moral awareness, integrity, and sense of responsibility in a sustainable manner amidst the challenges of the digital era.

The Effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Strategies in Shaping the Honest Character of Generation Z Students

Based on interviews with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers across the three schools, the strategy of leading by example emerged as the most influential approach; this is because Generation Z students are more inclined to emulate observable behavior than to simply accept theoretical advice. As stated by MN, a PAI teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Padang Tiji, "Students today pay more attention to a teacher's attitude. If a teacher is disciplined, honest, and responsible, students come to respect those qualities and gradually adopt that same behavior." This finding is reinforced

by the researcher's observations, which showed that the PAI teachers demonstrated discipline in their instruction, maintained objectivity in assessment, and addressed acts of dishonesty such as cheating and the manipulation of assignments through reprimands. Strategies aimed at fostering habits such as prohibiting cheating, requiring independent completion of assignments, and operating an honesty canteen accustom students to acting honestly in their daily activities; as explained by IW, an Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Padang Tiji, "habits such as the ban on cheating, completing assignments independently, and the honesty canteen make students accustomed to behaving honestly in their daily activities".

Furthermore, PAI teachers reported using dialogic approaches to encourage students to express opinions, reflect on moral issues, and discuss honesty-related situations. A PAI teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Padang Tiji described classroom dialogue as a way of encouraging students to think and respond actively to moral issues rather than merely receiving instructional material. Similarly, the principal of SMA Negeri 1 Kembang Tanjong reported that students appeared more comfortable expressing concerns and receiving guidance when communication was conducted in a supportive manner. Observations showed teachers using questions, discussions, and individual conversations when addressing students' behavior and moral concerns. Interview data also indicated that teachers connected honesty with Islamic values and worship practices to reinforce students' understanding of honesty as part of *akhlak* (moral character). In addition, teachers reported using digital media, including Islamic educational videos, social media, and online learning platforms, to communicate moral messages in ways they considered relevant to Generation Z students. Across the three schools, interviews and observations indicated several honesty-related student behaviors, including participation in moral discussions, responses to teachers' guidance, acknowledgment of mistakes, and discussions concerning academic honesty. These findings describe the practices and perceived responses associated with the five strategies; they do not establish causal effectiveness, reductions in cheating, or longitudinal increases in students' moral awareness.

Table 1. Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Strategies in Fostering Honesty among Generation Z Students

PAI Teachers' Strategy	Form of Implementation	Observed/Reported Honesty-Related Responses	Supporting Data Sources
Exemplary conduct (<i>uswah hasanah</i>)	Teachers maintain discipline, assess objectively, and address dishonest behavior.	Participants reported that students tend to emulate teachers' honest and responsible behavior; observations documented punctuality, objective assessment, and responses to cheating.	Interview; Observation; Documentation
Habit formation	Prevention of cheating, independent assignments, honesty canteen, and examination supervision.	Participants described students as becoming accustomed to honesty, discipline, and independence; school documents showed relevant rules and programs.	Interview; Observation; Documentation
Dialogic approach	Two-way communication, moral discussions, personal mentoring, and counseling.	Participants reported greater openness in discussing moral issues; observations showed dialogue and individual guidance concerning student behavior.	Interview; Observation
Spiritual strengthening	Religious-value instruction, short religious talks, joint prayers, and Qur'an recitation.	Participants associated honesty with worship, moral responsibility, and Islamic values; relevant religious activities were observed and documented.	Interview; Observation; Documentation

Utilization of digital media	Educational videos, WhatsApp groups, online platforms, and Islamic content.	Teachers reported that digital media facilitated the delivery of moral messages and student engagement; observations documented the use of digital materials where applicable.	Interview; Observation
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Source: Synthesized from interviews, participant observations, and school documents.

The Impact of Honesty Coaching on Academic Achievement and Social Development of Generation Z Students

Participants perceived honesty-fostering practices as potentially supporting students' learning motivation, discipline, responsibility, and confidence, rather than as directly improving academic achievement. PAI teachers reported that emphasizing honest effort encouraged students to focus on the learning process rather than merely obtaining high grades. A PAI teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Kembang Tanjung explained that students were regularly reminded that good grades should be achieved through honest effort and that this message was perceived to encourage greater enthusiasm for learning. Similarly, a PAI teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Padang Tiji reported that students who were accustomed to honesty appeared more disciplined and motivated in their studies and increasingly valued the learning process. Student participants also described greater satisfaction and confidence when completing assignments independently. One student stated, "I am now more motivated to study because the teacher frequently reminds us of the importance of honesty. I feel greater satisfaction when I earn a grade based on my own hard work." Observational and documentary evidence provided contextual support for these accounts, including teachers' reminders about academic honesty, independent assignments, and school rules concerning cheating and plagiarism. However, the study did not include objective academic achievement measures, pre-post comparisons, or a comparison group; therefore, these findings should be interpreted as participants' reported and observed perceptions of possible academic benefits rather than evidence that honesty-fostering strategies caused improvements in academic achievement.

Students with intrinsic motivation tend to be more active, disciplined, and confident in completing academic tasks because they value the learning process more than merely focusing on final grades. Researcher observations also indicate an increase in student learning motivation; students appear more active in lessons, diligent in completing assignments, and more disciplined in participating in academic activities. Beyond academic impacts, the fostering of honesty also contributes positively to the social development of Generation Z students within school, family, and community environments. Research findings indicate that the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are capable of enhancing mutual trust between students and teachers, cultivating a sense of social responsibility, reducing negative social behaviors such as cheating, information manipulation, and bullying and fostering social concern and solidarity.

An Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Tangse stated, "We consistently instill in students the idea that honesty is a fundamental basis for life. When students become accustomed to being honest, they are more open with their teachers and unafraid to admit mistakes, leading to a closer teacher-student relationship." A school counselor also explained, "Mutual trust begins to emerge when students are no longer afraid to disclose the true situation, whether regarding assignments, rule violations, or personal issues". They feel that teachers do not merely punish but also provide guidance. Within the community, the cultivation of honesty shapes a younger generation characterized by integrity demonstrated by respecting the rights of others, acting in a trustworthy manner, and upholding social norms. Documentary data indicates a decline

in disciplinary infractions related to dishonest behavior and student social conflicts. The reduction in incidents of student-on-student bullying, tardiness, and disciplinary infractions demonstrates that the school's character-building initiatives have successfully fostered a social environment that is more harmonious and conducive to the development of Generation Z students. Researcher observations also indicate that students are exhibiting greater discipline and openness, alongside more positive social interactions such as cooperation during group study sessions and mutual assistance when peers face difficulties.

Tabel 2. The Impact of Fostering Honesty on Students' Academic Achievement and Social Development

Impact Aspect	Indicators of Success	Research Findings	Category
Academic Achievements	Increasing responsibility for learning	Students complete independent assignments on time and with discipline.	Increase
	Increased learning motivation	Students are enthusiastic about learning and active in the learning process	Increased
	Increased interest in learning	Students are interested in participating in lessons and are confident enough to ask questions	Increased
	Discipline in completing assignments	Students submit assignments on time and adhere to rules	Improving
	Confidence in the results of one's own work	Students are confident in their own abilities and do not cheat	Increased
Social Development	Mutual trust between teacher and student	Harmonious relationships, open communication	Improved
	Social responsibility	Students uphold trust, maintain discipline, and care for the environment	Improving
	Reduction in negative behavior	Cheating, bullying, and manipulation decrease	Decreased
	Social concern and solidarity	Students helping each other, cooperation, empathy	Increasing
	Harmonious social relationships	Positive interactions, minimal conflict, mutual respect	Improving

Source: Interview

The Use of Media and Methods in the Strategies of Islamic Religious Education Teachers for Fostering Honesty Values in Gen Z Students

Based on interviews, observations, and document analysis, the use of learning media and methods aligned with the characteristics of Generation Z significantly contributes to the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers' strategies in fostering Islamic values of honesty among students in high schools in Pidie Regency. The school principal stated that the school provides full support by supplying facilities such as LCD projectors, Wi-Fi networks, and computer laboratories to enable teachers to utilize more engaging and effective technology-based learning media. An Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Padang Tiji explained that the use of digital media such as videos, animations, and inspiring stories greatly aids in teaching the concept of honesty; this is because Generation Z students are more engaged by and better grasp messages conveyed through audiovisual media compared to lecture-based methods alone. A similar view was

expressed by a PAI teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Tangse, who noted that combining habituation and case study methods with interactive presentation media encourages students to think more critically and understand the importance of honesty in real-life contexts. Observations indicate that the teacher utilized an LCD projector to display educational videos, presentation slides, and illustrations of cases involving dishonesty, while students actively engaged in discussions and shared their opinions. Documentation including lesson plans, activity photos, and student reflection worksheets reinforces the finding that combining digital media with methods such as modeling, discussion, habituation, and case studies fosters a more effective internalization of the value of honesty; this is because students gain not only theoretical knowledge but also real-world experience in applying the value to their daily lives. Thus, the success of fostering honesty is largely determined by the teacher's ability to select and integrate media and methods that are relevant to the times and the needs of the students.

Table 3. Use of Media and Methods in Fostering the Value of Honesty

Aspect	Findings	Data Source
School Support	Provision of LCD projectors, Wi-Fi, and computer laboratories	Principal interview
Digital Media	Educational videos, PowerPoint, animations, internet	Interview with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher
Learning Methods	Leading by example, discussion, case studies, habituation, dialogue	Interviews with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and students
Student Participation	Actively asks questions and participates in discussions; shows high enthusiasm	Classroom Observation
Documentation	Lesson plans, activity photos, student reflection sheets	School documentation

Source: Interview

Discussion

Research findings identifying the exemplary conduct of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers as the most dominant strategy for fostering honesty among Generation Z students stem from this generation's emphasis on the authenticity and behavioral consistency of authority figures particularly amidst a barrage of often unverified digital information (Setiawan et al., 2025; Cahaya, 2022). Having grown up in a digital ecosystem rife with manipulative content and information of questionable veracity, Generation Z students tend to respond more readily to concrete examples than to normative advice (Zhou et al., 2025). When an Islamic Religious Education teacher demonstrates consistency between words and actions such as punctuality, objectivity in assessment, and the courage to admit mistakes it establishes the moral credibility that forms the foundation of students' trust in the values being taught.

These findings are consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory, particularly the concept of observational learning, which explains that individuals can acquire and reproduce behaviors by observing models and the consequences associated with those behaviors (Saihu et al., 2020). In the context of Islamic education, these findings confirm the concept of *uswah hasanah* popularized by Abdullah Nashih Ulwan (Wien Khakleri, et al. 2025), wherein serving as a role model constitutes the most fundamental educational method, given that learners naturally imitate the behavior of their educators. These results align with research by Lickona, T (Konstantina Tsoli, 2021) which posits that effective character education requires moral role models whom learners can consistently observe as well as studies by Zafar & Abu-Hussin (2025), which emphasize that

character formation cannot be achieved solely through cognitive instruction but requires internalization through the observation of actual behavior (Pan & Carpenter, 2023).

The finding that habituation strategies, a dialogic approach, and spiritual reinforcement work synergistically to foster honesty stems from the fact that these three strategies complement one another in simultaneously shaping students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Sukadari et al., 2020; Ridwan et al., 2019). The dialogic approach creates a space for critical and open-minded Generation Z students to explore moral values through discussion and reflection, ensuring that their understanding of honesty is not dogmatic but rather the result of rational awareness internalized through a process of critical thinking (Zafar & Abu-Hussin, 2025). Meanwhile, the practice of habituation serves as a mechanism for behavioral reinforcement through consistent repetition, transforming abstract values into concrete habits embedded in students' daily routines (Yamin et al., 2023). Spiritual reinforcement adds a transcendental dimension that links honesty with religious awareness, ensuring that students are honest not merely out of fear of social sanctions, but from the realization that honesty is an integral part of obedience to Allah SWT. These findings support Lafmejani (2019) theory of moral development specifically the post-conventional stage of moral consciousness, wherein individuals act based on internalized universal ethical principles as well as (2023) character education theory, which emphasizes the importance of balancing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. From an Islamic perspective, these findings reinforce the concept of *tarbiyah* (holistic upbringing/education) proposed (Islam et al., 2021), which posits that religious education must integrally address intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Learning motivation also corroborates these findings, demonstrating that an approach engaging both cognitive and affective aspects simultaneously is more effective in shaping sustainable behavior than an approach focused solely on the transfer of knowledge (Saha et al., 2024).

The use of digital media to foster honesty demonstrates moderate to high effectiveness because digital media constitutes the everyday language of Generation Z an integral part of their identity making moral messages conveyed through familiar formats easier to accept and process (Insani et al., 2024). Digital media such as educational videos, animations, and infographics can present abstract concepts of honesty in concrete visual and narrative forms, thereby facilitating understanding and information retention (M.Ag, 2022). Furthermore, digital media enables teachers to reach students outside of class hours via WhatsApp groups and online platforms, creating continuity in character development that extends beyond the classroom (Ardiansyah et al., 2024). However, the effectiveness of using digital media relies on adequate supervision and guidance, as easy access to information can also foster plagiarism and digital dishonesty. These findings support Bauer et al (2023) theory regarding the characteristics of the "Digital Generation," who prefer visual, interactive, and collaborative learning. The results also align with the concept of digital pedagogy developed by Ali (2020), which posits that educators need to adopt methods suited to the learning styles of digital natives. In the context of Islamic education, these findings extend Alim (2020) perspective that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) strategies must adapt to the changing times without losing the essence of Islamic values. Research by Rensfeldt & Rahm (2023) also affirms that the pedagogical competence of 21st-century teachers encompasses the ability to utilize digital technology to support the achievement of learning objectives, including the character development of students.

The finding that fostering honesty significantly impacts students' academic achievement and social development can be explained by psychological mechanisms wherein honesty builds self-efficacy and academic integrity foundations for intrinsic learning motivation (Aggarwal et al.,

2023). Students with an honest character develop confidence in their own abilities because they are accustomed to relying on personal effort rather than cheating, thereby enhancing their academic resilience and perseverance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In the social dimension, honesty serves as social capital that fosters trust in interpersonal relationships, reduces conflict, and strengthens solidarity within the school community (Kholis et al., 2022). Honest students tend to be more respected and trusted by their peers, creating a social environment that is safe and conducive to both personal and academic development. These findings confirm the intrinsic motivation theory proposed by Ryan, R. M., & Deci (2000) part of Self-Determination Theory which posits that autonomy, competence, and social relatedness are fundamental psychological needs that drive optimal learning motivation. The results also align with Sardiman's (2018) findings that strong learning motivation directly influences academic achievement, as well as with research by Saha et al, (2024) regarding the role of discipline in student behavior and achievement. From the perspective of Islamic education, these findings reinforce view that noble character is not merely the ultimate goal of education but also a means to achieve success in both this life and the Hereafter (Gede Agung et al., 2024). Research by Taqa (2025) on the psychology of learning also indicates that a positive psychological state including self-confidence fostered through honesty correlates positively with students' academic achievement.

This study enriches the theory of Islamic character education by integrating a contextual approach based on the characteristics of Generation Z and digital media. It develops a conceptual model for fostering honesty that links Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher strategies specifically role modeling, habituation, dialogue, spiritual reinforcement, and digital media with dimensions of value internalization; a connection that had not previously been comprehensively integrated within Islamic education literature. Furthermore, the findings extend Saihu et al, (2020) Social Learning Kurniawan and Fitriyani (2023) character education theory by incorporating digital and spiritual based strategy elements relevant to the digital era (Fathurrochman et al., 2020). This study provides guidance for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers on developing instructional strategies that are adaptive to the characteristics of Generation Z without compromising the essence of Islamic values; it also encourages professional development through training in digital literacy, creative pedagogy, and character building grounded in Islamic values.

This study has several limitations. First, its qualitative multiple-case design was limited to three public senior high schools in Pidie Regency; therefore, the findings are context-specific and should not be generalized to other educational levels or socio-cultural settings. Second, several findings were based on participant self-reports, which may be influenced by social-desirability bias, particularly when discussing honesty and academic misconduct. Third, although interviews, observations, and documents were triangulated, researcher interpretation may still have involved confirmation bias; systematic coding and cross-case comparison were therefore used to reduce this risk. Fourth, the study cannot establish causal effects of honesty-fostering strategies on students' honesty or academic achievement because it did not employ experimental, pre-post, or longitudinal measures. Fifth, the participant structure was purposively selected and limited to 33 participants across four stakeholder groups, and data adequacy was assessed through thematic saturation rather than statistical sampling. Sixth, the selection of schools that already implemented Islamic character-building programs may have introduced selection bias and may limit transferability to schools with different institutional conditions. Finally, the study did not include longitudinal follow-up, so the sustainability of honesty internalization could not be determined. Future research should employ broader multi-site, mixed-methods, and longitudinal designs,

including objective behavioral or academic indicators, to examine the durability and possible effects of honesty-fostering practices.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to foster honesty among Generation Z students in high schools in Pidie Regency comprise five provenly effective approaches: leading by example (*uswah hasanah*), habituation, a dialogic approach, spiritual reinforcement, and the use of digital media. Leading by example stands out as the most dominant and influential strategy, as Generation Z students respond more readily to tangible behavior than to theoretical advice particularly when teachers demonstrate consistency between their words and actions through discipline, objective assessment, and the courage to admit mistakes. Strategies fostering habituation such as prohibitions against cheating, independent assignments, and "honesty canteens" instill a sense of honesty that becomes internalized in students' daily routines, while a dialogic approach creates space for critical thinking and open reflection on moral values. Spiritual reinforcement adds a transcendental dimension that links honesty with religious awareness, and the use of digital media aligns strategies with the characteristics of a tech-savvy generation, making moral messages easier to grasp and understand. The impact of these strategies is evident in heightened moral awareness, reduced cheating, a growing sense of responsibility, increased courage to speak the truth, and strengthened teacher-student relationships all of which contribute to improved academic achievement and the students' social development.

This study holds theoretical, practical, and policy significance for the development of Islamic character education in the digital era. Theoretically, it enriches the body of knowledge on Islamic education by developing a conceptual model for fostering honesty integrating strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, instructional methods and media, facilitating and inhibiting factors, and the impact on the behavior of Generation Z students elements that had not previously been comprehensively integrated within character education literature. Furthermore, the study extends Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Thomas Lickona's character education framework by incorporating digital- and spiritual-based strategies relevant to the context of the digital era. In practical terms, this study provides guidance for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers on developing instructional strategies that adapt to the characteristics of Generation Z without compromising the essence of Islamic values; it also fosters teacher professionalism through training in digital literacy, creative pedagogy, and character development grounded in Islamic values. From a policy perspective, the findings recommend strengthening school-based character education programs through synergy among families, schools, and the community, alongside policies that support the development of teachers' digital competencies, the provision of technology-based learning facilities, and the inclusion of character assessment as an integral part of the educational evaluation system.

This study has limitations that warrant attention, particularly because its scope is restricted to three public high schools in Pidie Regency and focuses on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and Generation Z students; consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to other educational levels or regions with different socio-cultural characteristics. Furthermore, due to time constraints, the long-term impact of the implemented guidance strategies may not yet be apparent, necessitating further research to examine the sustainability of the internalization of honesty values over a longer period. For future research, it is recommended to test the effectiveness of this honesty-fostering model across a broader range of educational levels using quantitative or mixed-

methods approaches to measure its impact more objectively and precisely. Longitudinal studies are also highly advisable to examine the long-term sustainability of the internalization of honesty values, as well as the factors influencing the consistency of students' honest behavior after completing high school. Furthermore, the development of models incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) and gamification for Islamic character education represents a promising research avenue in the digital era, given that future generations will be increasingly integrated with advanced technologies, necessitating innovative approaches to character education.

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