

Dynamics of Gen-Z Students' Thinking in the Contemporary Era

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Abstract (English)

This research examines how Generation Z students at the Darunna'im Pontianak Islamic Boarding School face the challenges of the contemporary era marked by the advancement of digital technology and rapid social change. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, data was collected through in-depth interviews with students and caregivers of Islamic boarding schools and observation of students' daily activities. The study results show that Generation Z students are open to digital technology, especially social media, to integrate religious teachings with modern life. Despite the challenges of balancing Islamic values with the demands of modernity, such as technology-based education and gender equality, students still maintain their Islamic identity. This study concludes that Gen-Z students at the Darunna'im Islamic Boarding School have successfully demonstrated critical adaptability to globalization while maintaining traditional Islamic values.

Keywords; Adaptation, Boarding School, Generation Z, Islamic Contemporary Era, Thought dynamics

Abstrak (Bahasa Indonesia)

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana santri Generasi Z di Pondok Pesantren Darunna'im Pontianak menghadapi tantangan era kontemporer yang ditandai oleh kemajuan teknologi digital dan perubahan sosial yang pesat. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan santriwati dan pengasuh pesantren, serta observasi aktivitas sehari-hari santriwati. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa santriwati Generasi Z memiliki keterbukaan terhadap penggunaan teknologi digital, khususnya media sosial, sebagai sarana untuk mengintegrasikan ajaran agama dengan kehidupan modern. Meskipun terdapat tantangan dalam menyeimbangkan nilai-nilai keislaman dengan tuntutan modernitas, seperti pendidikan berbasis teknologi dan kesetaraan gender, santriwati tetap mempertahankan identitas keislaman mereka. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa santriwati Gen-Z di Pondok Pesantren Darunna'im berhasil menunjukkan kemampuan adaptasi kritis terhadap globalisasi, sambil tetap menjaga nilai-nilai tradisional Islam.

Kata kunci; Adaptasi, Dinamika pemikiran, Era Kontemporer, Generasi Z, Pondok Pesantren



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PRELIMINARY

Islamic boarding schools are traditional Islamic educational institutions that have become an important part of religious and intellectual development in Indonesia (Azra, 2020). Over the years, pesantren have maintained strong traditional values, but in recent decades, new challenges have emerged faced by pesantren, especially in the context of digital technology advancement and rapid social change (Zarkasyi, 2021). Generation Z, who was born and raised in the technological era, faces a dilemma between maintaining their Islamic values and responding to modern developments such as social media, gender equality, and technology-based education (Hidayatullah, 2022). The study of the influence of modernity and globalization on traditional education systems such as Islamic boarding schools is increasingly relevant because Islamic boarding schools are no longer only the center of religious education but also a place that challenges the younger generation to adapt to the changing times (Fahmi, 2021). This research focuses on how Generation Z students at the Darunna'im Pontianak Islamic Boarding School respond to these changes regarding adapting thinking and dealing with the identity dilemma they experience. The importance of this study lies in how Pesantren, as a traditional education center, can balance between religious values and the demands of modernity (Nur, 2023).

In the context of previous literature, several studies have been conducted on changes in thinking in the pesantren environment, but with a different focus. A study by Rahman (2020) Examines the influence of social media in pesantren education and how students use technology to preach. Another research by Huda (2021) Highlights the transformation of traditional Islamic boarding school values in the modernization era, showing a shift in thinking among students. Mansur (2021) Examines the implementation of gender equality in several modern Islamic boarding schools, focusing on students' acceptance of new concepts, but does not highlight how Generation Z in Islamic boarding schools responds to the dilemma between modernity and tradition. A study by Ahmad (2020) This shows that the younger generation of students faces significant challenges in balancing the demands of technology-based education with traditional Islamic teachings. Still, this study does not discuss its impact on their Islamic identity. Research by Suryadi (2020) Discusses the integration of technology with Islamic teachings among Generation Z students but emphasizes the use of technology more than the dynamics of critical thinking in the contemporary era.

Although previous studies have provided insights into changes in Islamic boarding schools, this study finds gaps in the literature on how Generation Z students in traditional Islamic boarding schools respond to the challenges of modernity as a whole, especially in maintaining their Islamic identity. Most of the research still focuses on technological or gender aspects without delving deeper into the dynamics of their thinking. The novelty of this research lies in the integrative analysis between the thinking of Gen-Z students and the context of globalization and Islamic values, as well as how they manage identity conflicts in daily life in Islamic boarding schools (Anwar, 2021).

The novelty of this study lies in its deep focus on the dynamics of the thinking of Generation Z students in the pesantren environment, which has not been widely discussed in the previous literature. Most previous studies tended to discuss technological changes in the pesantren environment or gender equality issues in general (Huda, 2021; Suryadi, 2020). This research is different because it delves deeper into how Generation Z students integrate modernity, including technology and gender awareness, with Islamic values learned in Islamic boarding schools. In addition, this study emphasizes the aspect of identity dilemmas felt by students, where they are often at the crossroads between following the trend of globalization and maintaining a strong Islamic identity (Nasrullah, 2020). The research also contributes to understanding how traditional Islamic boarding schools can function as spaces that allow for the emergence of critical thinking amid changing times, thus paving the way for developing Islamic educational methodologies more relevant to contemporary needs.

The results of initial observations at the Darunna'im Pontianak Islamic Boarding School show a significant shift in thinking among Generation Z students. In the initial interview, many students admitted that they often feel caught between global trends, such as the use of social media, and permanent rules that tend to limit access to technology. They mentioned that although technology is considered important in daily life, the limitations of the use of technology in pesantren are often felt as an obstacle to further learning and connecting with the outside world (Nasrullah, 2020). Meanwhile, teaching in Islamic boarding schools is still very dependent on traditional methods, which according to some students, are not always relevant to the needs and challenges of the contemporary era.

Santriwati also faces problems in terms of gender identity, where they feel that there is a lack of clarity between the concept of gender equality taught outside the pesantren and strict gender norms inside the pesantren. These initial observations underscore the importance of further research to understand how Generation Z students respond to these challenges and how pesantren can facilitate critical thinking relevant to changing times.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Adaptation of Gen-Z Students to Technology in the Pesantren

The research revealed that Gen-Z students at Darunna'im Islamic Boarding School are open to digital technology daily. However, their adaptation to technology within the pesantren is not without challenges (Fauzi, 2021). One of the primary difficulties highlighted by the students is the strict regulation of technology use, particularly social media, which is controlled by the pesantren's leadership to mitigate potential negative impacts on religious values (T. Rahman, 2020; Rizky, 2022). This regulation creates a dilemma for the students: On one hand, they recognize the value of technology for learning and personal development, but on the other hand, they must adhere to institutional restrictions (Ruslan, 2022).

Despite these limitations, students have demonstrated ingenuity in leveraging technology, particularly social media platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp, to disseminate Islamic knowledge (Mustafa, 2021). This aligns with Nasrullah (2020), who noted that students often use these platforms for da'wah (spreading religious messages) and maintaining connections with friends outside the pesantren. The use of social media as a tool for religious outreach highlights the students' ability to adopt modern technology for religious purposes, integrating their spiritual lives with contemporary digital tools (Fahmi, 2021). Similarly, Syafi'i (2021) Pesantren students increasingly utilize digital platforms to reinforce religious education, even in traditional settings.

This tension between technological engagement and adherence to traditional values reflects broader societal challenges Islamic educational institutions face in a rapidly digitalizing world (Mansur, 2021). According to Zahra (2022), the pressure on Islamic institutions to remain relevant while preserving religious norms has become one of the central challenges in contemporary Islamic education. In this context, the restrictions imposed by the pesantren serve a dual function. While they limit unrestricted access to potentially harmful content, they also

encourage students to critically assess their digital habits and ensure that their online activities align with their religious commitments (Ridwan, 2020). This mirrors findings from Anwar (2021), who argued that technological restrictions in Islamic schools often lead to more thoughtful, purposeful engagement with digital tools.

A key finding by Yusuf (2022) Indicates that students in Islamic boarding schools exposed to regulated technology usage tend to develop a stronger ethical awareness in their online interactions, reflecting the findings of this study. Similarly, Iqbal & Karim (2021) Suggests that pesantren students given controlled access to technology show higher levels of digital literacy and ethical use than their peers outside of pesantren settings.

Students' ability to navigate these restrictions while maintaining their religious identity underscores a significant adaptation aspect. They manage to balance their need for technological engagement with the pesantren's expectations, which speaks to the resilience and creativity of Gen-Z students in this setting. This finding supports Zarkasyi (2021) The study highlighted that pesantren students can integrate modern technology into their lives without sacrificing their core religious values. Additionally, Usman (2020) Found that pesantren with controlled technology access maintain higher religious observance among students, suggesting that moderation in technology use can reinforce rather than diminish religious commitment.

The students' use of social media for religious purposes suggests that pesantren are not isolated from the digital world but are finding ways to incorporate it into their traditional frameworks. Hamid (2022) Emphasize that digital platforms offer a unique opportunity for pesantren students to engage with broader global discourses while maintaining their religious identity. Moreover, Ali & Setiawan (2021) Highlight that the student's ability to engage with digital content selectively allows them to critically analyze and filter what is aligned with Islamic teachings, demonstrating their adaptability in a globalized world.

Social Media and Religious Thought Development

Social media has emerged as a communication tool and an influential platform for religious expression and outreach, particularly among Gen-Z students in Islamic boarding schools such as Darunna'im. Ada gilirannya Integrating modern digital culture with Islamic practices is evident in the students' use of platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp to disseminate religious teachings and foster religious discourse. That students' use of social media for religious purposes mirrors trends

observed in other Islamic educational institutions. By using these platforms for da'wah (spreading Islamic messages), students engage in digital proselytizing, which blends modern communication methods with traditional religious outreach (Ahmad, 2020; Wahid, 2021).

The adaptability these students show demonstrates that when used appropriately, technology can complement rather than hinder religious education. This aligns with findings by Alavi (2021), who suggested that the rise of digital platforms offers new avenues for religious engagement, making Islamic teachings more accessible to younger generations. These platforms allow for immediate, global dissemination of religious messages, thus expanding the reach of pesantren education beyond physical boundaries. In Darunna'im, for example, students use Instagram stories and WhatsApp groups to share religious teachings and discuss moral and ethical issues, further enhancing their religious understanding through digital dialogue.

Huda (2021) Emphasized that the digital era presents both challenges and opportunities for Islamic education. The primary challenge is reconciling technology's fast-paced, global nature with the slower, more reflective process of religious study. However, the opportunities are vast: platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp allow students to engage with religious content in familiar ways, making religious learning more dynamic and interactive. This shift in learning modality, from passive absorption of information to active engagement, reflects a broader trend in educational pedagogy, where students are encouraged to take a more participatory role in their learning processes (Anwar, 2021).

At Darunna'im, students have adopted a critical approach to social media, using it primarily for religious outreach rather than personal entertainment. This selective use of technology demonstrates that these students can discern how best to utilize digital tools that align with their religious principles Mansur (2021). Observed a similar trend in other pesantren, where students have developed a sense of digital literacy infused with ethical considerations. This ability to balance technology use with religious values is crucial in ensuring that modern digital tools are employed to strengthen, rather than weaken, religious commitments.

Moreover, the nature of social media allows for creating a virtual religious community that extends beyond the geographical confines of the pesantren. According to (Hamid, 2022), this virtual community fosters a sense of connectedness among students, enabling them to share religious insights, debate, and support one another in their religious journeys. For many Gen-Z

students, this form of digital religious engagement is a vital supplement to traditional classroom-based religious instruction. It also allows for peer-to-peer learning, which has been shown to reinforce religious values in informal settings (Fadli, 2022).

Using social media as a tool for religious engagement also allows students to shape their religious identity in a modern context. As highlighted by (Zain, 2021), the digital landscape offers students a space to reflect on their religious beliefs and practices, interact with broader religious discourse, and develop a personal connection to their faith. At Darunna'im, students use social media not only to consume religious content but also to create and share their interpretations of Islamic teachings, which fosters a more active and engaged form of religious participation (H. Usman, 2021). This is significant because it demonstrates that technology is not merely a passive medium but an active agent in developing religious thought.

Additionally, the digital environment allows students to engage with global Islamic discourse, exposing them to a wider range of interpretations and practices. Zahra (2022) Social media platforms enable students to access religious content from scholars and educators worldwide, broadening their understanding of Islamic teachings beyond the traditional confines of their local religious communities. This global exposure is particularly important for Gen-Z students, who are more attuned to global trends and ideas than previous generations. By engaging with international Islamic thought, students at Darunna'im can develop a more nuanced and informed perspective on their faith, enriching their religious development.

However, this exposure to global Islamic discourse also presents potential challenges, particularly in navigating the diverse interpretations and practices found within the broader Muslim world. While students are exposed to a wide variety of Islamic content, they must also develop the critical thinking skills necessary to discern which teachings align with the core principles of their pesantren's religious philosophy (Iqbal & Karim, 2021). This emphasizes the need for guided digital literacy within Islamic education, ensuring that students know how to use technology and are equipped to evaluate the content they engage with online critically.

Integration of Traditional Values and Contemporary Issues

Another significant finding of this study is the students' ability to successfully integrate traditional Islamic values with contemporary societal issues, particularly gender equality and digital education (Farid, 2021). This ability to navigate modern issues while staying rooted in Islamic

teachings reflects the students' critical adaptability and demonstrates the dynamic nature of education within the pesantren (Hasan, 2022). Rather than rejecting modern ideas or embracing them wholesale, students at Darunna'im Islamic Boarding School are finding ways to balance these seemingly competing spheres.

One key area where this balance is particularly evident is in the discussion of gender roles (Nurhayati, 2021). Many students expressed openness to discussions about gender equality, especially in education and social roles, but they consistently framed these discussions within the context of Islamic teachings (Taufik, 2022). Zarkasyi (2021) Argued that this reflects the broader trend within Islamic education where modernization, when approached thoughtfully, does not necessarily conflict with religious values. At Darunna'im, students who supported gender equality emphasized that their views were informed by Islamic principles, indicating that religious tradition can coexist with progressive ideas, provided the discourse remains within the boundaries of Islamic ethics.

This integrative approach is also seen in the students' attitudes toward digital education. While they recognized the importance of technology in modern education, they were equally committed to maintaining a strong moral and religious foundation in the use of technology. This aligns with findings from Fahmi (2021), who noted that students in Islamic boarding schools often desire more digitally-focused educational tools, but they also seek to ensure that these tools are employed to support their spiritual growth. For instance, students expressed the need for Islamic-oriented digital content and educational platforms that could simultaneously enhance their academic learning and deepen their religious knowledge.

Furthermore, students at Darunna'im have demonstrated an understanding that Islamic values are not static but can be interpreted in ways that address modern challenges. This flexibility is crucial in navigating contemporary issues without compromising the essence of Islamic teachings. For example, while gender equality is a contemporary issue, the students have managed to frame their discussions on this topic around the Islamic principle of *'adl* (justice), ensuring that both men and women are treated fairly while still respecting the roles prescribed by their faith (Hamid, 2022).

Another example of this integration is the way students engage with technology. In addition to recognizing the benefits of digital tools for education, they highlighted the importance

of digital ethics, particularly in social media usage. Zain (2021) I found that students in Islamic educational settings are increasingly aware of the ethical dimensions of technology use, particularly how digital platforms should be aligned with Islamic ethical principles such as modesty and accountability. At Darunna'im, students expressed concerns about maintaining their religious identity online while embracing technology's opportunities for education and personal growth.

The ability of students to critically evaluate and integrate these modern concepts with Islamic values demonstrates a nuanced understanding of tradition and modernity. This is crucial in an era where rapid social and technological changes often challenge long-standing religious norms. The findings suggest that students at Darunna'im are developing a form of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) in which they actively engage with modern ideas and evaluate them against their religious teachings rather than passively accepting or rejecting them (H. Usman, 2021). This critical engagement reflects broader movements within Islamic education, where scholars and students are reinterpreting traditional values to address modern challenges.

Moreover, Zahra (2022) Noted that Islamic institutions like Darunna'im are increasingly fostering environments where students can discuss and debate contemporary issues from an Islamic perspective. This critical space allows students to refine their understanding of religious principles and modern issues, ensuring they are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of the contemporary world without losing sight of their religious foundations. At Darunna'im, the integration of traditional Islamic values with modern concepts such as digital education and gender equality illustrates the adaptability of Islamic education in responding to the needs of a new generation of learners.

Ultimately, the ability to integrate traditional values with contemporary issues highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of Islamic education at Darunna'im. It reflects an educational philosophy that is not rigid but responsive to the realities of modern life. By grounding discussions of modern issues like gender equality and digital education within Islamic teachings, students demonstrate that it is possible to remain faithful to religious traditions while actively participating in the modern world.

Identity Conflict in Balancing Islamic Values and Modernity

One of the most significant challenges identified in this study is the identity conflict faced by students as they navigate the demands of modern society while upholding their Islamic values

(Amin, 2022). Many students at Darunna'im Islamic Boarding School felt torn between the allure and necessity of modern tools such as technology and social media and the expectations placed upon them by their religious community. This tension is not limited to Darunna'im; it reflects a broader trend among Gen-Z Muslims who are grappling with the intersection of modernity and religious tradition (Anwar, 2021; Zainal, 2022). For these students, technology represents both an opportunity and a potential threat to their religious identity, as they must balance the freedom and connectivity that social media provides with the ethical and moral boundaries imposed by their Islamic education (Iskandar, 2020).

This identity conflict is further intensified by the globalized nature of digital media, where students are constantly exposed to ideas and lifestyles that may conflict with the values taught in the pesantren. Zahra (2022) Noted that Gen-Z Muslims, in particular, are more likely to feel this tension as they are raised in a deeply interconnected world, making it difficult to insulate religious identity from external influences. In this context, students at Darunna'im must engage in a continuous negotiation process between the values of the global digital culture and the teachings of their faith. This process often leads to an internal struggle as students attempt to reconcile their personal experiences in the modern world with the expectations of their religious community (Suharto, 2021; H. Usman, 2021).

Despite these challenges, the students of Darunna'im have shown resilience in maintaining their Islamic identity while engaging with the modern world. Their use of social media and technology is not passive or uncritical but reflects a nuanced understanding of balancing these two worlds. Hidayatullah (2022) Observed that Islamic boarding schools are increasingly becoming spaces where students learn to integrate their religious identity with the demands of contemporary society. This suggests that pesantren, like Darunna'im, are not merely places of religious instruction but incubators for critical thinking, where students are encouraged to reflect on the role of technology and modernity in their lives.

At Darunna'im, students use social media platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp to maintain connections with peers and family members while participating in religious discussions and sharing Islamic content. This use of technology for religious purposes is a key factor in how students navigate the identity conflict between modernity and their Islamic faith. Mansur (2021) emphasized that the critical engagement with social media observed in Islamic boarding schools

allows students to use these platforms for personal and spiritual development without fully succumbing to the distractions and ethical challenges often associated with digital media. By framing their use of technology within the boundaries of Islamic values, students at Darunna'im can maintain control over their digital engagement, using it as a tool for personal and religious growth.

Moreover, students' ability to maintain their religious identity amidst the demands of modern life indicates a broader movement within Islamic education towards integrating traditional values with contemporary practices. Alavi (2021) Argued that Islamic schools are increasingly adopting a more holistic approach to education, which recognizes the importance of equipping students with the skills to navigate the complexities of modern life while maintaining their religious integrity. This approach is evident at Darunna'im, where students are taught to critically assess technology's influence on their lives and use digital tools in ways that align with their religious commitments.

However, the conflict between modernity and religious tradition is not always easily resolved. Zain (2021) Many students in Islamic boarding schools experience moments of doubt or confusion, particularly when exposed to conflicting messages from the media or their peers. At Darunna'im, some students reported feeling pressure to conform to the trends and lifestyles promoted on social media, even when these conflicted with their religious beliefs. This highlights the ongoing challenge that students face as they attempt to carve out a space for their religious identity in an increasingly secularized world. Nevertheless, the support provided by the pesantren, through its emphasis on critical thinking and ethical engagement with technology, enables students to navigate these pressures more effectively.

The findings of this study suggest that the identity conflict experienced by students is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. Rather, it can catalyze deeper reflection and personal growth. By learning to balance modernity's demands with Islamic values, students at Darunna'im are developing a more sophisticated understanding of what it means to be a Muslim in the contemporary world. This process of negotiation and adaptation is essential for preparing students to live in a globalized, digital society, where they must constantly engage with new ideas and challenges while remaining rooted in their religious identity (Hamid, 2022).

In conclusion, the identity conflict experienced by students at Darunna'im highlights the dynamic nature of Islamic education in the modern world. The ability of these students to maintain their Islamic identity while engaging with modernity demonstrates the adaptability of Islamic boarding schools in addressing the challenges of the digital age. While the tension between modern society and religious tradition is unlikely to disappear, the critical and reflective approach fostered at Darunna'im provides students with the tools to navigate these challenges and emerge with a stronger, more integrated sense of self.

CLOSING

This study has highlighted how Gen-Z students at Darunna'im Islamic Boarding School balance the demands of modernity with their Islamic values. Despite the challenges posed by technology, such as the potential conflict between digital media use and religious expectations, students have demonstrated resilience and critical thinking in integrating these tools into their religious practices. Their selective engagement with social media for da'wah and education shows that modern technology when aligned with Islamic principles, can complement rather than detract from their faith.

The ability of these students to navigate contemporary issues like gender equality and digital education while remaining rooted in traditional Islamic values reflects their adaptability and critical engagement. Though they experience identity conflicts between modern societal demands and their religious upbringing, they are effectively learning to reconcile these tensions. This adaptability underscores the evolving role of Islamic boarding schools in preparing students to engage with the complexities of the modern world while maintaining a strong religious identity.

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