The Character of the Millennial Generation in Building Moral Faith Education

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Abstract

Many millennials do not have a strong understanding of the faith. Social media is often the main source of information for the millennial generation, but it is not always of positive value. Many millennials feel trapped between traditional norms and pressure from the global society. Moral faith education is an important foundation in shaping the character of the millennial generation. The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of the millennial generation in the context of moral faith education, explore the challenges they face, and recommend effective strategies for building a more adaptive faith education. This study uses a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach, using purposive sampling techniques, in which around 20–30 people who meet certain criteria are interviewed. The main data collection tool is an open-ended question designed to explore respondents' opinions and experiences related to moral faith education. The data from the interviews were encoded and analyzed using thematic analysis methods. The millennial generation shows a high awareness of the importance of religious education, but also faces great challenges in understanding and implementing moral values in the digital era. The character of the millennial generation shows a combination of traditional values and modern adaptations in moral faith education, how the millennial generation responds to moral faith education, as well as finding effective strategies to overcome the challenges they face. With a better understanding, it is hoped that faith education can be adjusted to the needs of the younger generation.

Keywords: millennial generation, moral education, education

Introduction

The level of novelty and sophistication of the reference material is shown through the proportion of the literature of the last 10 years and refers to the primary literature. The problems, objectives, and usefulness of the research are written narratively in paragraphs without the need for special subheadings. Likewise, operational definitions, if deemed necessary, are written narratively.

Millennials rely heavily on technology and social media to get information (Marauri-Castillo et al. 2021). Research shows that around 75% of millennials prefer to learn beliefs and

morals through digital platforms rather than traditional methods. Apparently, along with the increasing accessibility of information, many millennials are actually lost in the radicalization of thoughts that are contrary to the moral values they teach. Digital platforms often create echo chambers where users mostly only find information that reinforces their initial beliefs (Baumgaertner & Justwan 2022; Figà Talamanca & Arfini 2022; Kowert, Martel, & Swann 2022; Zaid et al. 2022).

Millennials tend to have different values than previous generations. The values held by millennials exhibit dynamic qualities and undergo transformation over time (Foad, Maio, & Hanel 2021; Jain, Gupta, & Verma 2023). Research shows that more than 60% of millennials believe that moral faith education must explore multiple beliefs in order to create social justice. What surprises many is the claim of those who prefer to be "spiritual but not religious". This kind of personalization is a form of resistance to the dominant ideological framework (Abbott & Franks 2021; Jain et al. 2023; Selvam & Githinji 2022).

Many millennials do not have a strong understanding of the faith. Research shows that the presence of moral content in everyday interactions is much rarer than expected (Atari et al. 2023; Fuligni, Smola, & Salek 2022). According to the survey, about 55% of millennials admit to not having a religious education. Research reveals that individuals who have educational qualifications below the high school level show very high mortality rates compared to their peers who achieve higher education (Khan et al. 2023; Marrero Galván et al. 2023; Yamashita et al. 2022).

Social media is often the primary source of information for millennials, but it does not always have a positive impact. Social media influencers exert a significant influence in shaping the political perspectives of young demographic groups (Basch, Basch, Hillyer, & Meleo-Erwin 2022; Peter & Muth 2023; Valkenburg et al. 2021). About 70% of millennials admit that information about their beliefs and morals from social media is often confusing and inaccurate. This reliance can result in an overemphasis on engagement and superficial information (Bhargava & Velasquez 2021; Epstein et al. 2023).

Many millennials feel trapped between traditional norms and pressures from the global community. Individuals belonging to ethnic minority groups among millennials often challenge conventional discourses around national identity (Harrington, Overall, & Maxwell 2022; Wood 2022). A study showed that 63% of millennials find it difficult to balance religious values with the demands of modern lifestyles (Duque & Matos 2022; Foad et al. 2021), which often contradicts good moral teachings (Köbis, Bonnefon, & Rahwan 2021).

Millennials' interest in participating in religious activities shows a downward trend (Monnot & Wernli 2023; Novak et al. 2022). This trend is in line with broader theories of secularization and individualization, which indicate a generational shift away from traditional religious practices (Coutinho 2023). Data show that only 25% of millennials are active in religious or community activities related to faith education, compared to previous generations (Tížik 2022).

Previous research, such as that conducted by Zaid et al. (2022), has shown how technology and social media affect the mindset of young generations in understanding faith (Bingaman 2023; Isetti 2022). These findings are relevant to the current phenomenon, where around 70% of millennials are influenced by information from social media, both positively and negatively (Lee et al. 2022). This shows the need to integrate technology in faith education to reach and educate millennials more effectively.

Research by Fuligni et al. (2022) also highlights the identity crisis experienced by young generations when dealing with traditional and modern values (Rogers, Cook, & Guerrero, 2022). Recent findings reinforce that 63% of millennials find it difficult to balance moral values with modern lifestyles (Jain et al., 2023). This relevance demonstrates the importance of designing a faith education curriculum that can help millennials find self-identity as individuals who uphold religious values in an increasingly complex world context (Wulandari, Milla, & Muluk, 2022).

The millennial generation lives in an unprecedented digital era, where access to information is very fast and easy. The novelty of this research arises from the need for a special study on how the character of the millennial generation is influenced by technology and social media, as well as how this contributes to the formation of moral education and beliefs. This research is expected to provide a new perspective in designing educational programs that are relevant and attractive to the millennial generation.

The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of the millennial generation in the context of moral faith education, explore the challenges they face, and recommend effective strategies to build a more adaptive faith education. By understanding the character of this generation, it is hoped that the educational programs created are not only relevant but also able to foster strong religious and moral awareness among millennials.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology was selected to explore the experiences, perceptions, and meanings that millennials attribute to moral and faith education. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of how individuals interpret and engage with religious education in their everyday lives. Rather than measuring attitudes quantitatively, the study focused on participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they construct through their interactions with religious values and educational practices.

Participants

The participants in this study were millennials aged 18–30 years who lived in [specific research location]. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria relevant to the research objectives, particularly individuals with experience or a background in religious education. The study planned to involve approximately 20–30 participants, with the final number determined by the depth and relevance of the information obtained during data collection. This sampling strategy was intended to recruit individuals capable of providing detailed accounts of their experiences and perspectives on moral and faith education.

Research Procedures

The research was conducted through several stages. First, the researchers established participant selection criteria based on the study objectives and identified individuals who met those criteria. Second, selected participants were contacted and informed about the purpose and procedures of the study. Third, interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through digital communication platforms, depending on participants' availability and circumstances. In addition, relevant documents and educational materials used or referred to by participants were collected as supplementary data. Finally, the interview transcripts and supporting documents

were organized, examined, and analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns related to millennials' experiences of moral and faith education.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured, open-ended interviews designed to explore participants' opinions, experiences, and interpretations of moral and faith education. The interview questions focused on participants' understanding of religious values, their experiences of religious education, and the ways these values are reflected in everyday life. Interviews were conducted either in person or through digital platforms to accommodate participants' circumstances. Documentary data were also collected, including relevant educational materials and documents used or referred to by participants. These documents served as supplementary sources to provide contextual information and support the interpretation of interview findings.

Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis began with the transcription and repeated reading of interview data to develop familiarity with participants' accounts. Relevant statements were then coded and grouped into categories based on recurring meanings and patterns. These categories were subsequently developed into broader themes reflecting participants' experiences and perceptions of moral and faith education. Documentary data were examined to provide additional context and compared with interview findings through source triangulation. This process was intended to strengthen the credibility of the interpretation by identifying areas of convergence, complementarity, and possible differences between the data sources.

Results

Implementation of the Direct Practice Method in Akidah Akhlak Learning

The interview findings indicate that the implementation of the direct practice method in Akidah Akhlak learning at MI Muhammadiyah Kobisonta involved institutional policies, curriculum considerations, teacher instructional strategies, and supporting facilities. Six school personnel provided information regarding the implementation of this method, particularly in teaching prayer practices to third-grade students.

On Monday, 13 October 2025, from 08:00 to 08:30 WIT, the head of the madrasah, Tihurua, A.Ma., explained that implementing direct practice in Akidah Akhlak learning required clear institutional policies. The head emphasized the importance of providing facilities, conducting teacher training, and integrating practical activities into the learning process. These measures were considered necessary to ensure that Akidah Akhlak learning extended beyond theoretical understanding and supported the development of students' discipline and responsibility.

On Tuesday, 14 October 2025, from 08:45 to 09:10 WIT, the vice principal for curriculum, Indah Aprilina Sari, S.Pd., stated that the direct practice method was consistent with the curriculum implemented at MI Muhammadiyah Kobisonta. According to her, the method supported application-oriented learning and character development. Through direct prayer practice, students were not only introduced to the procedures of worship but were also encouraged to develop discipline and responsibility in performing religious activities.

The response of students to the learning method was described by Titi Linggar Sari, S.Pd., the student affairs teacher, during an interview on Monday, 13 October 2025, from 08:35 to

08:55 WIT. She reported that students found it easier to understand prayer movements and enjoyed opportunities to practice what they had learned. This account suggests that practical activities were positively received by students and provided opportunities for active participation in learning.

The Akidah Akhlak teacher for Grade 3, interviewed on Monday, 13 October 2025, from 09:00 to 09:45 WIT, described several instructional stages used to teach prayer. These included demonstrating prayer movements, guiding students through collective practice, providing repeated exercises, delivering feedback, and encouraging regular prayer habits. The teacher explained that students were guided through these activities to help them become more familiar with the movements and procedures of prayer.

Institutional financial support was also identified as part of the implementation process. Maftuhah, the school operational assistance (BOS) treasurer, stated during an interview on Monday, 13 October 2025, from 09:50 to 10:15 WIT, that school funds were allocated to support practical Akidah Akhlak learning. The allocation included prayer guidebooks, ablution equipment, and facilities for practical activities in the mosque or classroom.

Further information regarding students' learning progress was provided by Nur Wulan, a classroom teacher, during an interview on Monday, 13 October 2025, from 10:20 to 10:45 WIT. She reported that students had become more attentive to prayer movements and recitations and showed greater enthusiasm when participating in the daily Dhuha prayer activities. She also observed improvements in students' prayer recitations through repeated practice and habituation. As she explained, students were increasingly enthusiastic about performing Dhuha prayer, and their recitations had improved through continuous repetition.

Student Demographic Distribution

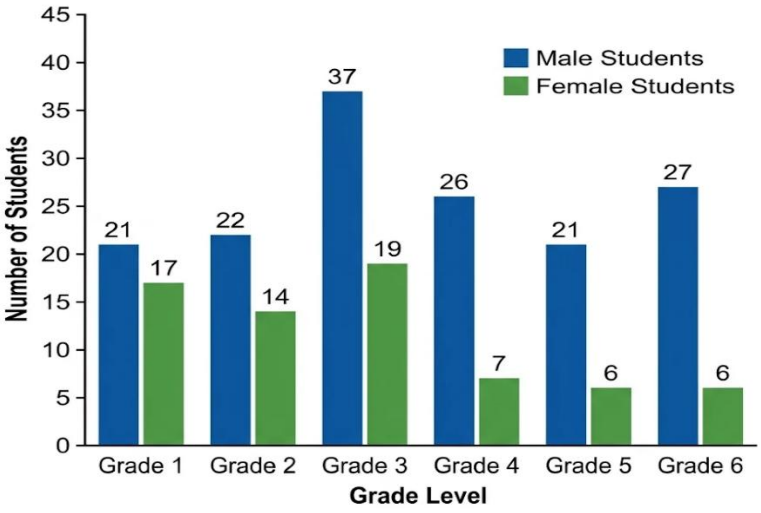


Figure 1. Distribution of Students by Gender Across Grades 1–6

The student demographic data show the distribution of male and female students across six grade levels at MI Muhammadiyah Kobisonta. Grade 1 consisted of 21 male and 17 female students, while Grade 2 had 22 male and 14 female students. Grade 3 recorded the highest enrollment, with 37 male and 19 female students. Grade 4 consisted of 26 male and 7 female students; Grade 5 had 21 male and 6 female students; and Grade 6 had 27 male and 6 female students.

Overall, the madrasah had 208 students, comprising 138 male students and 70 female students. The data indicate that male students outnumbered female students at every grade level.

Student Graduation Data

Table 1. Student Graduation By Gender, 2020–2024

Year	Male	Female	Total
2020	10	13	23
2021	13	6	19
2022	16	18	34
2023	11	7	18
2024	9	6	15
TOTAL	59	50	109

Table 1 presents the number of male and female students who graduated between 2020 and 2024. In 2020, 23 students graduated, consisting of 10 males and 13 females. The number decreased to 19 students in 2021, comprising 13 males and 6 females. In 2022, the number of graduates increased to 34 students, representing the highest figure during the five years, with 16 males and 18 females.

The number of graduates subsequently declined to 18 students in 2023, consisting of 11 males and 7 females. In 2024, the total decreased further to 15 students, comprising 9 males and 6 females. Overall, the data show fluctuations in the number of graduates, with the highest number recorded in 2022 and a decline during the following two years.

Discussion

Direct Practice as an Approach to Religious and Character Education

The findings indicate that the direct practice method was implemented through a combination of demonstration, guided practice, repetition, feedback, and habituation. This sequence reflects an application-oriented approach in which students are given opportunities to observe and perform religious practices rather than relying exclusively on verbal explanations. In the context of prayer instruction, teacher demonstrations provide an initial model, while guided and repeated practice allows students to become familiar with the movements and recitations.

The positive responses reported by school personnel suggest that students appreciated opportunities to practice prayer directly. The classroom teacher also reported improvements in students' attention to prayer movements and recitations. These observations indicate that practical learning activities provided opportunities for students to develop procedural understanding and participate more actively in religious learning. Nevertheless, the available evidence primarily consists of interview accounts and does not include standardized measurements of students' prayer skills before and after the implementation of the method.

The findings also suggest a relationship between prayer habituation and the development of discipline and responsibility. Regular participation in Dhuha prayer and repeated exercises may provide opportunities for students to become accustomed to following an organized sequence of religious activities. From a character education perspective, discipline can be associated with consistency in performing scheduled activities, while responsibility can be reflected in students' efforts to follow the procedures taught by their teachers. However, these character-related outcomes should be interpreted as educational indications reported by school personnel rather than as independently measured changes in students' character.

Institutional Support and Learning Resources

The implementation of direct practice was not limited to the teacher's instructional activities. The findings show that institutional policies, curriculum arrangements, teacher development, and financial resources also contributed to the learning process. The head of the madrasah emphasized the need for adequate facilities and teacher training, while the vice principal for curriculum considered practical learning consistent with the application-oriented direction of the madrasah curriculum.

The availability of prayer guidebooks, ablution equipment, and spaces for practical activities further supported the implementation of the method. These resources provided the facilities needed for students to observe and practice religious procedures. This finding highlights the importance of institutional support in translating curriculum objectives into classroom activities. A learning method that requires students to engage in direct practice depends not only on teacher competence but also on the availability of appropriate learning resources and institutional arrangements.

The allocation of BOS funds for learning facilities also indicates that financial planning formed part of the implementation process. However, the existence of budget allocations alone does not establish the quality or effectiveness of their use. Further evidence, such as budget documentation, facility inventories, and classroom observations, would be necessary to assess the extent to which these resources were consistently available and utilized.

Repetition, Habituation, and Students' Religious Development

The teacher's use of repeated exercises and daily Dhuha prayer activities indicates that habituation was an important component of the learning process. Repetition allowed students to revisit prayer movements and recitations, while routine religious activities provided opportunities to practice them regularly. The classroom teacher's account of increased student enthusiasm and improved prayer recitations suggests that repeated exposure and practice may have supported students' familiarity with the procedures of worship.

In Akidah Akhlak education, practical religious activities can connect conceptual understanding with observable behavior. Students are introduced to the meaning and procedures of worship while being guided to demonstrate them through practice. In this respect, prayer instruction can serve as a learning context for developing religious habits and encouraging discipline and responsibility. Nevertheless, the development of these values requires more than participation in activities; it also involves students' understanding of the religious meanings and ethical principles underlying the practices.

The findings therefore support the interpretation that direct practice and habituation provided opportunities for religious learning and character development. However, the study does not establish that the method alone produced changes in students' attitudes or behavior. Such a conclusion would require more systematic observations, assessment of students' performance, and evidence of behavioral consistency beyond the reported classroom activities.

Student Demographics and Graduation Trends

The demographic data show that male students constituted a larger proportion of the student population across all six grade levels. This information provides a general description of the madrasah's student composition. However, the demographic distribution does not directly explain the implementation or outcomes of the direct practice method in Grade 3 Akidah Akhlak learning.

Similarly, the graduation data show fluctuations between 2020 and 2024, with the highest number of graduates in 2022 and a decline in 2023 and 2024. These figures provide institutional background information but cannot be used as evidence of the effectiveness of the direct practice method. The data do not establish a relationship between graduation trends and the implementation of prayer instruction because they do not identify students' participation in the learning method or provide a comparison of academic and character outcomes.

Accordingly, student demographic and graduation data should be treated as descriptive institutional information rather than indicators of the success of the instructional method examined in this study.

Conclusion

The millennial generation shows a high awareness of the importance of religious education, but they also face great challenges in understanding and applying moral values in the digital era. The character of the millennial generation shows a combination of traditional values and modern adaptations in moral education and morality. They need a relevant and interesting approach to improve the understanding and application of Islamic morals. This research aims to explore how the millennial generation responds to moral education and find effective strategies to overcome the challenges they face. With a better understanding, it is hoped that faith education can be adjusted to the needs of the younger generation. This research also seeks to provide recommendations for the development of a curriculum that includes a digital approach to help the millennial generation better understand and interact with Islamic moral values. The results of this research are expected to be the basis for the development of a more effective and adaptive faith education program by integrating technology and learning methods that are relevant to the lives of millennials. The limitations of this study include the limited sample size and diversity of respondents, who may not be fully representative of the entire millennial population in Indonesia. Further research is recommended to involve more variables, such as family and community factors, and conduct longitudinal studies to understand changes in the understanding of moral beliefs in the millennial generation over time.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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