

SOFT SKILLS INTELLIGENCE IN GENERATION Z FOR ENHANCING FUTURE SUCCESS

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Abstract

The rapid development of the digital era and the emergence of the Industrial Revolution 5.0 require Generation Z to possess not only technological competence (hard skills) but also strong soft skills intelligence, including communication, collaboration, leadership, empathy, and adaptability. This study aims to analyze the role of soft skills intelligence in enhancing future success among Generation Z and to identify educational strategies for its development based on Islamic values. This research employed a qualitative library research design, utilizing secondary data sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents, and classical as well as contemporary Islamic education literature. Data were analyzed through thematic content analysis focusing on the conceptual relationship between soft skills intelligence, emotional intelligence, and Islamic educational principles. The findings indicate that soft skills intelligence functions as a critical determinant of Generation Z's future success, particularly in strengthening emotional regulation, ethical decision-making, leadership capacity, and adaptability in digital-social environments. Furthermore, the study reveals that the integration of Islamic values – such as akhlaq al-karimah, uswah hasanah, tazkiyatun nafs, and social responsibility – significantly enhances the effectiveness of soft skills development, distinguishing it from purely secular competency frameworks. This study contributes uniquely by offering an integrative conceptual model of soft skills intelligence grounded in Islamic educational values, providing a value-based framework for educators and policymakers to design holistic learning environments that respond to the socio-emotional challenges faced by Generation Z in the digital era.

Keywords: Soft Skills Intelligence; Generation Z; Emotional Intelligence; Islamic Education

A. Introduction

Soft skills are a set of personal and interpersonal attributes that enable individuals to interact effectively with others in various situations. This involves several aspects such as communication, teamwork, leadership, empathy, adaptability, and other interpersonal skills. Soft skills (Rafzan. et al., 2019) are important for building a successful career. Soft skills can be one of the supporting factors for someone to stand out in various situations. Soft skills are one of the important things that must be developed in life or in the world of work. Even if an individual succeeds in getting good grades from their studies at school or university, if they do not succeed in honing their soft skills properly, they may experience difficulties in facing the world of work (Rafzan. et al., 2019).

Soft skills are crucial in the world of work and important because *they* form the basis of how a person interacts and communicates with others. Organisations/companies value employees who have strong *soft skills* because they have the ability to work in teams, lead, solve problems, and adapt to changes in the environment better. Additionally, employees with good *soft skills* can also influence productivity, innovation, and job satisfaction.

The advancement of the era in the 5.0 industrial revolution has brought significant changes to the demands for human resource competencies. The modern workplace no longer only demands technical abilities, but also the ability to adapt, communicate, collaborate, and think critically. According to the *World Economic Forum* report (Soeharso & Tripomo, 2021), around 80% of the skills needed by the future workforce are *soft skills*, while the remaining 20% are *technical skills*.

Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) is a generation that grew up amid the development of digital technology. They are known to be adaptable to technology, creative, and quick learners. However, many studies show that this generation faces challenges in terms of emotional intelligence, face-to-face communication, and social cooperation (Wardhana, 2025). This indicates the need to strengthen *soft skills* so that Generation Z can achieve success in the future (Dolot, 2018; Liu et al., 2019; Tulgan, 2013).

Although previous studies have extensively discussed soft skills development and emotional intelligence among young people (Goleman, 1997; Sutiyatno, 2023), most existing research tends to adopt secular psychological or employability-based frameworks, focusing primarily on workplace readiness or generic life skills. There remains a limited number of studies that conceptualize soft skills intelligence through a value-based educational lens, particularly one grounded in Islamic principles that emphasize moral character (*akhlaq*), exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*), self-purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*), and social responsibility. Consequently, the integration of Islamic educational values into soft skills intelligence for Generation Z has not been sufficiently theorized or systematized (Asiyah et al., 2024; AURINA, 2019).

Based on this gap, the present study seeks to extend existing literature by offering a conceptual analysis of soft skills intelligence for Generation Z that is explicitly grounded in Islamic educational values. This approach positions soft skills not merely as functional competencies but as ethically oriented intelligences that support holistic human development in the digital era.

Accordingly, this study is guided by the following objectives: To examine the conceptual foundations of soft skills intelligence relevant to Generation Z in the context of the Industrial Revolution 5.0. To analyze the challenges faced by Generation Z in developing soft skills, particularly in socio-emotional and interpersonal domains. To formulate an Islamic value-based framework for developing soft skills intelligence as a strategic foundation for future success.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach based on a library research design to analyze the concept of soft skills intelligence among Generation Z within an educational framework grounded in Islamic values. This research was purely conceptual

and document-based, aiming to synthesize and critically examine theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and normative frameworks related to soft skills, emotional intelligence, Generation Z characteristics, and Islamic educational principles. A library-based approach was selected to allow a systematic and in-depth exploration of existing knowledge without involving empirical field data or direct interaction with research participants.

Data sources consisted exclusively of secondary data, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy reports, and authoritative publications related to soft skills development, Generation Z, emotional intelligence, and Islamic education. The literature was collected through systematic searches of reputable academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed journals, and national journal portals, covering publications from [2024–2025] to ensure both theoretical depth and contemporary relevance. The document selection process followed inclusion criteria focusing on relevance to the research topic, academic credibility, and alignment with educational and Islamic value-based perspectives.

Data analysis was conducted using an inductive qualitative content analysis procedure. The analytical process began with organizing and categorizing the selected literature based on key thematic areas, including definitions of soft skills intelligence, socio-emotional challenges faced by Generation Z, educational strategies for soft skills development, and the integration of Islamic values such as *akhlaq al-karimah*, *uswah hasanah*, and moral responsibility. Subsequently, the literature was critically reviewed to identify recurring patterns, conceptual relationships, and theoretical gaps. These findings were then synthesized into coherent themes and interpreted to construct a comprehensive narrative framework that explains the significance of soft skills intelligence for Generation Z and its development within Islamic education. To enhance analytical rigor, cross-source comparison and theoretical triangulation were applied, ensuring consistency and depth in the interpretation of findings.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Findings

Conceptualization of Soft Skills Intelligence in Education

The findings of this study indicate that soft skills intelligence constitutes a multidimensional construct that goes beyond technical competence and academic achievement. Robles (2012) conceptualizes soft skills as personal attributes, social cues, and communication abilities essential for professional success, (While & Eadson, 2022) while Spencer and Spencer (2008) emphasize behavioral competencies such as adaptability, integrity, initiative, empathy, and cooperation. These perspectives confirm that soft skills are not innate traits alone but developable competencies shaped through education and social interaction.

Within the educational context, the framework proposed by (Lippman, 2015) provides a comprehensive structure by categorizing soft skills into interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive domains. This classification demonstrates that soft skills intelligence integrates emotional regulation, social interaction, and higher-order thinking skills. The synthesis of

these models suggests that soft skills intelligence functions as a holistic capacity that enables individuals to respond adaptively to complex personal, social, and professional challenges, particularly in the rapidly evolving digital era.

Emotional Intelligence as the Foundation of Soft Skills Development

The analysis further reveals that emotional intelligence plays a central role in shaping soft skills intelligence. (Goleman, 2005) defines emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, manage, and utilize emotions effectively in oneself and others, comprising self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These dimensions directly correspond to core soft skills competencies such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and adaptability. Empirical and theoretical studies consistently demonstrate that individuals with high emotional intelligence tend to exhibit stronger interpersonal relationships, ethical decision-making, and resilience in professional environments (Bar-On, 2010; Mayer et al., 2008, 2008). In the context of Generation Z, emotional intelligence becomes increasingly critical, as digital-mediated interactions often limit opportunities for direct emotional engagement. Thus, emotional intelligence serves as a psychological and pedagogical foundation upon which soft skills intelligence can be systematically developed through educational interventions.

Generation Z: Technological Strengths and Soft Skills Challenges

The findings also highlight a significant imbalance between technological competence and socio-emotional skills among Generation Z. This generation is characterized by high digital literacy, rapid information processing, and multitasking abilities. However, studies indicate persistent challenges related to face-to-face communication, emotional regulation, empathy, and sustained collaboration (Putra & Noordiana, 2016).

In workplace contexts, employers increasingly emphasize the importance of work ethics, responsibility, teamwork, and adaptability alongside technological proficiency (Ledoh et al., 2024; World Economic Forum, 2023). The literature reviewed in this study suggests that without intentional soft skills development, Generation Z risks experiencing difficulties in professional integration, leadership readiness, and ethical decision-making. Therefore, soft skills intelligence emerges as a strategic competence that enables Generation Z to balance technological intelligence with interpersonal and emotional intelligence, ensuring long-term career sustainability.

Soft Skills Intelligence from an Islamic Education Perspective

One of the key findings of this study is that Islamic educational values provide a robust normative and ethical foundation for soft skills intelligence. In Islamic education, soft skills align closely with the concepts of *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character) and *adab* (ethical conduct). Al-Ghazali emphasizes that emotional and social competencies are integral to *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), which forms the basis of moral and character development (Ahmad, 2020).

Educational institutions such as *pesantren* demonstrate the practical relevance of this framework by embedding discipline, cooperation, empathy, leadership, and responsibility into daily learning and social practices. Previous studies confirm that value-based educational environments contribute significantly to students' character formation, social responsibility, and emotional maturity (Hashim & Langgung, 2008; Nata, 2018). Unlike secular soft skills frameworks that often emphasize functional employability, the Islamic education perspective integrates ethical intentionality, spiritual awareness, and social accountability, thereby strengthening the moral dimension of soft skills intelligence.

Integrative Discussion and Contribution of the Study

Synthesizing the findings, this study demonstrates that soft skills intelligence for Generation Z cannot be effectively developed through technical training alone. Instead, it requires an integrative approach that combines emotional intelligence, socio-cognitive skills, and value-based education. The distinctive contribution of this study lies in its conceptual integration of contemporary soft skills and emotional intelligence theories with Islamic educational values, offering a holistic framework that addresses both functional competence and moral development. This integrative model extends previous research by positioning soft skills intelligence not merely as employability skills, but as ethically grounded intelligences essential for personal integrity, social harmony, and sustainable success in the digital era. Consequently, this framework provides meaningful implications for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to design character-oriented and future-responsive educational systems for Generation Z.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study reaffirm that soft skills constitute a set of non-technical competencies that play a decisive role in determining individual success in the contemporary global era, particularly for Generation Z. While Generation Z is widely recognized for its strong digital literacy and technological adaptability, this study supports previous research indicating that technical proficiency alone is insufficient to ensure sustainable career success (Robles, 2012; World Economic Forum, 2023). Instead, soft skills – such as communication, teamwork, creativity, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence – emerge as critical competencies that enable individuals to navigate complex social and professional environments.

This finding aligns with (Lippman, 2015), who emphasize that soft skills are essential for workforce readiness, particularly in occupations requiring collaboration, adaptability, and independent decision-making. In the context of Generation Z, the rapid transformation of work characterized by digitalization, artificial intelligence, and cross-cultural collaboration demands a balance between technological intelligence and interpersonal competence. The literature indicates that employees with strong soft skills demonstrate higher adaptability to organizational change, better teamwork performance, and greater long-term employability compared to those who rely primarily on technical expertise (Spencer & Spencer, 2008).

Furthermore, this study highlights the central role of emotional intelligence as a foundational element of soft skills development. Consistent with Goleman (2005) and Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2008), emotional intelligence enables individuals to recognize and regulate emotions, manage stress, and build constructive social relationships. Generation Z faces unique psychological and social pressures, including constant exposure to digital information, performance expectations, and social comparison through social media. Without adequate emotional regulation skills, these pressures may hinder collaboration, decision-making, and professional resilience. Therefore, emotional intelligence functions not merely as a personal trait but as a strategic competence that supports effective communication, leadership, and sustained motivation.

Compared to earlier studies that focus predominantly on soft skills from a secular or employability-oriented perspective, this study extends the discussion by emphasizing the relevance of value-based education, particularly Islamic educational principles. From an Islamic education perspective, soft skills development is intrinsically linked to *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character), *adab* (ethical conduct), and *tazkiyatun nafs* (self-purification). Al-Ghazali's perspective underscores that emotional and social competencies are inseparable from moral and spiritual development, suggesting that effective soft skills education must address both ethical intention and behavioral practice. Empirical studies in Islamic educational contexts have demonstrated that value-based learning environments contribute significantly to students' responsibility, discipline, empathy, and leadership qualities (Nata, 2018; Hashim & Langgulung, 2008).

The discussion also indicates that pedagogical strategies play a crucial role in translating soft skills theory into practice. Collaborative learning and project-based learning have been shown to foster communication, teamwork, responsibility, and creativity, which are core components of soft skills intelligence. Research on project-based learning confirms its effectiveness in enhancing problem-solving abilities and learner autonomy, particularly when tasks are connected to real-world challenges (Bell, 2010). Additionally, leadership and public speaking activities contribute to self-confidence and interpersonal competence, which are highly valued in professional contexts. Importantly, the integration of Islamic values—such as honesty, empathy, and social responsibility—within these learning strategies strengthens the ethical dimension of soft skills development, distinguishing it from purely skills-based training models.

Overall, this study reinforces the argument that soft skills development for Generation Z must be approached holistically, integrating cognitive, emotional, social, and moral dimensions. By synthesizing contemporary soft skills and emotional intelligence theories with Islamic educational values, this study offers a more comprehensive framework for preparing Generation Z to face future social and professional challenges. This value-based approach not only enhances employability and adaptability but also contributes to the formation of individuals with strong character, ethical awareness, and social responsibility.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that soft skills constitute a fundamental determinant of future success for Generation Z, particularly in the context of the digital era characterized by rapid technological change and complex social dynamics. The findings emphasize that technological proficiency must be balanced with emotional intelligence and interpersonal competence to ensure that Generation Z develops not only cognitive excellence but also social wisdom, ethical awareness, and adaptive capacity. Soft skills such as communication, collaboration, emotional regulation, creativity, and problem-solving emerge as essential competencies that enable Generation Z to navigate professional, social, and moral challenges effectively.

From a practical perspective, this study offers several important implications. For educators, the findings highlight the need to design learning environments that intentionally integrate soft skills development into both curricular and extracurricular activities through collaborative learning, project-based learning, leadership training, and reflective practices. In Islamic educational institutions, including pesantren and value-based schools, the integration of Islamic values – such as *akhlaq al-karimah*, *adab*, honesty, empathy, and responsibility – should be embedded systematically within teaching strategies to strengthen the ethical and character dimensions of soft skills. For parents, this study underscores the importance of consistent role modeling, emotional guidance, and digital supervision at home, as family environments play a crucial role in reinforcing socio-emotional competencies and value-based behaviors learned at school. For policymakers, the findings suggest the urgency of formulating educational policies and curriculum frameworks that explicitly position soft skills intelligence and character education as core learning outcomes, alongside academic and technological competencies, to prepare Generation Z for sustainable participation in society and the workforce.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, as a library-based qualitative study, the analysis relies exclusively on secondary data and theoretical perspectives, without incorporating empirical field data from students, educators, or institutions. Second, the discussion focuses primarily on general educational and Islamic educational contexts, without differentiating variations across regions, institutional types, or socio-cultural backgrounds. These limitations may restrict the generalizability of the findings to specific educational settings.

Future research is therefore recommended to extend this study through empirical investigations, such as qualitative case studies or mixed-methods research involving Generation Z students, educators, and parents in diverse educational contexts. Further studies may also explore comparative analyses between Islamic-based and non-Islamic educational institutions in developing soft skills intelligence, as well as examine the effectiveness of specific pedagogical models in enhancing soft skills and emotional intelligence. Additionally, longitudinal research is needed to assess the long-term impact of value-based soft skills education on career success, social responsibility, and ethical leadership among Generation Z.

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