

Faith Integrated English Pedagogy for Generation Z Learners in Islamic Boarding Schools

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Received: dd mm yyyy

Revised: dd mm yyyy

Accepted: dd mm yyyy

KEYWORDS

Contextual teaching;
Islamic boarding school;
English teaching;
Generation Z;
Pedagogical Strategies

ABSTRACT

This study explores how English teachers in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools adapt their pedagogical practices to the learning characteristics of Generation Z students while maintaining religious and cultural values. The research was conducted at three pesantren, Darul Fikri, Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, and Ibnu Qoyyim, to examine how teachers address the challenges of teaching digital native learners in educational environments with limited technological access. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design involving six English teachers and eighteen students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal four major themes. First, Generation Z students prefer interactive, visual, collaborative, and emotionally supportive learning experiences. Second, teachers adapt their instruction through student-centered strategies such as gamification, storytelling, collaborative learning, and contextual teaching linked to students' daily pesantren experiences. Third, pedagogical innovation is constrained by rigid curricula, limited digital resources, and institutional regulations. Fourth, students respond positively to empathetic and contextually relevant teaching approaches that increase engagement and communicative confidence. This study contributes to English Language Teaching (ELT) literature by proposing a faith-integrated pedagogical adaptation model for Generation Z learners in pesantren contexts. The findings demonstrate that emotional intelligence, contextual relevance, and spiritual alignment can effectively sustain learner engagement even in digitally constrained educational settings. The study highlights the importance of balancing pedagogical innovation with religious and cultural values in faith-based education.

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Introduction

The accelerating forces of technological advancement and globalization have profoundly redefined educational paradigms and instructional practices across the globe. Within this dynamic transformation, the emergence of Generation Z commonly identified as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s has generated distinctive challenges and opportunities for educators, particularly within the domain of English language education. Within this transformation, the emergence of Generation Z, that individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, has introduced new challenges and opportunities for educators, especially in the field of English language teaching (ELT). In the area of English language teaching (ELL), in particular, it

has brought up new challenges and opportunities for educators. In this study, English Language Teaching (ELT) refers to the pedagogical practices, instructional strategies, and classroom approaches implemented by teachers, whereas English Language Learning (ELL) refers to students' experiences, behaviors, and processes of acquiring English as a foreign language. Distinguishing these concepts is important because the present study focuses specifically on how teachers adapt ELT practices to respond to the ELL characteristics of Generation Z learners in pesantren contexts.

Recent studies characterize Generation Z learners as digitally oriented individuals who prefer multimodal instruction, rapid feedback, collaborative interaction, and experiential learning environments (Hasbi et al., 2024; (Maqbool, 2020; (Walter, 2024). Growing up in technology-rich environments has shaped Gen Z learners into individuals who process information quickly, multitask across platforms, and engage more effectively with visual and interactive content than with conventional lecture-based instruction. These characteristics carry important pedagogical implications for ELT because traditional teacher-centered approaches, particularly grammar-translation and repetitive memorization, often fail to sustain learners' attention, communicative participation, and motivation. Instead, Gen Z learners tend to respond more positively to student-centered pedagogies such as gamification, collaborative learning, contextual tasks, and multimodal instruction that integrates visual, auditory, and experiential input.

In the Indonesian context, particularly within Islamic boarding schools, these pedagogical demands become more complex because digital access is institutionally restricted and learning is strongly shaped by religious discipline, communal values, and moral education. Pesantren traditionally prioritize spiritual formation, character development, and collective living, values that may appear contradictory to the autonomy, digital flexibility, and rapid information consumption associated with Generation Z learners. As a result, English teachers in pesantren must negotiate a delicate balance between accommodating students' digitally influenced learning preferences and preserving the ethical and spiritual identity of Islamic education. The challenge is therefore not merely technological but also pedagogical and cultural. Teachers are expected to recreate interactive and multimodal learning experiences through low-technology and context-sensitive strategies such as storytelling, collaborative discussion, role play, contextual learning, and emotionally supportive interaction.

Previous studies have shown that gamification, collaborative learning, and multimedia-based instruction significantly improve Gen Z students' engagement and communicative competence in mainstream educational settings (Tay, 2022; Nahdi et al., 2024; (Liang, 2022). However, most existing research has focused on secular, urban, and technology-rich learning environments, while limited attention has been given to faith-based educational institutions where technological resources and instructional flexibility are constrained. Furthermore, studies discussing contextual or culturally responsive teaching in ELT rarely examine how faith integration shapes students' identity formation, motivation, and language learning experiences. This indicates a significant research gap regarding how English teachers in pesantren adapt their pedagogical practices to align with Generation Z learners' characteristics while simultaneously maintaining institutional, cultural, and spiritual values.

Three prominent Islamic boarding schools that participated in this research were Ibnu Qoyyim, Darul Fikri, and Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung. Within the pesantren system, each of these schools stands out in its own way, but they all aim to produce graduates with strong moral convictions and strong minds. These institutions are emblematic of the larger trend in Indonesian education toward a more globalized curriculum that emphasizes the importance of students' ability to communicate effectively in English, especially within the context of religious instruction. Teachers at these pesantren face a number of obstacles when trying to engage students from Generation Z. These obstacles generally originate from inflexible curricula, a lack of digital media resources, and a disciplined culture that limits students' ability to be creative in class.

Teachers in the three pesantren were found to practice pedagogical resilience, modifying their instructional design to suit fluctuating classroom moods, learning levels, and institutional expectations. For instance, teachers often replaced long grammar lectures with storytelling, role

plays, or game-based vocabulary reviews to maintain attention and reduce student anxiety. Such adaptive practices resonate with what (Sholihah et al., 2024) describe as cultural sustainability in pedagogy, the ability to innovate while respecting local values and traditions. In this way, Islamic boarding school teachers are not passive transmitters of knowledge but active designers of learning experiences that humanize education and bridge generational divides.

In teaching, Pedagogical model, therefore, reflects a synthesis of global teaching principles and local wisdom, reaffirming the idea that educational innovation can thrive even in digitally constrained settings (Henson, 2025). The main objective of this study is to explore and interpret how English teachers in Darul Fikri, Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, and Ibnu Qoyyim pesantren adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate the learning characteristics of Generation Z students. Specifically, the study seeks to identify (1) the defining learning behaviors of Gen Z students in the pesantren context, (2) the pedagogical strategies teachers employ to address these behaviors, (3) the institutional and environmental factors influencing teaching innovation, and (4) students' responses to these strategies. Through this inquiry, the study aims to construct a comprehensive understanding of English pedagogy that is both culturally grounded and generationally responsive.

In response to this gap, the present study investigates how English teachers in Darul Fikri, Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, and Ibnu Qoyyim pesantren adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate the learning characteristics of Generation Z students. Specifically, the study explores students' learning behaviors, teachers' pedagogical adaptation strategies, institutional challenges influencing instructional innovation, and students' responses toward these pedagogical practices. This study contributes to the growing literature on English Language Teaching in faith-based educational contexts by proposing a faith-integrated pedagogical adaptation model that emphasizes emotional intelligence, contextual relevance, collaborative learning, and spiritual alignment as key components of effective English instruction for Generation Z learners in pesantren settings.

This study contributes theoretically and practically to English language education in faith-based learning environments. Theoretically, it expands research on Generation Z pedagogy and English Language Teaching in pesantren by proposing a faith-integrated pedagogical framework that combines emotional, cognitive, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of learning. Unlike technology-centered ELT studies, this research shows that effective pedagogy for Gen Z learners can also be achieved through emotional engagement, contextual learning, collaboration, and moral alignment. The study also highlights how English learning in pesantren functions as both language instruction and identity formation for Muslim learners in a globalized world.

Practically, the findings recommend student-centered and emotionally responsive teacher training, greater curricular flexibility in pesantren, and culturally appropriate integration of digital resources. Methodologically, the study encourages future longitudinal, mixed-method, and comparative research on faith-integrated pedagogy in both pesantren and secular educational contexts. Ultimately, the study emphasizes that meaningful educational innovation depends not only on technology but also on emotional intelligence, authentic interaction, and sensitivity to cultural and spiritual values.

The Theory/Literature

1. Features of Generation Z's Learning Style

Recent studies have shown that there are a number of characteristics shared by members of Generation Z that influence how they approach language learning. Students of Generation Z were born into the digital age and flourish in dynamic, graphic, and interactive classrooms. Relevance, teamwork, and originality are highly prized by this group, and they do well with gamified and experiential learning (Safitri, 2024; Hasbi et al., 2024). They are more engaged in activities that have relevance to real-life situations and less engaged in traditional, repetitious, teacher-centered learning. What this means for language teachers is that they can employ communicative and task-based methods to help their students use English in meaningful ways (Asyifa, 2022).

Generation Z students want things like quick feedback and emotional support in addition to intellectual challenges. According to (X. Liu, 2023), students learn better in emotionally

supportive environments; this theory posits that students experience less anxiety and greater motivation when their teachers are friendly, amusing, and sympathetic. Consequently, in the pedagogy of Generation Z, emotional connection is primary, rather than secondary.

2. The Role of Technology in the English Language Classroom

(Abdulrahman, 2020) demonstrates that modern ELT emphasizes multimodal instruction, which integrates text, images, audio, and interactivity to pique students' cognitive and emotional interests. In addition, (Amin & Aman, 2025) state that digital storytelling, gamification, and project-based learning were the most effective ways to motivate and retain information for students in Generation Z. However, these methods are hindered in pesantren by digital constraints. According to (Akdemir & Akdemir, 2023), teachers find innovative ways to circumvent school internet restrictions. They utilize pre-downloaded materials, printed infographics, and dramatization to create virtual interactive learning environments. Educators' ability to adapt and find solutions in low-tech settings is demonstrated by this innovation.

3. Gen Z's Impact on Education and the Importance of Teachers' Pedagogical Skills

Teachers' perspectives and levels of competence determine the success of educational adaptation. Integrating topic knowledge, teaching tactics, and an understanding of learners' characteristics is the emphasis of (Hanif, 2025) Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework. Beyond their pedagogical responsibilities, teachers in pesantren act as role models for their students.

Motivating and engaging Gen Z students is made easier through empathy-driven instruction. Students gain self-assurance and are more willing to take linguistic risks when their teachers are approachable, funny, and respectful (Demir, 2021). Educators are encouraged to include Islamic principles in lesson plans that promote creativity and effective communication through culturally responsive teaching (Madkur et al., 2024), which places an additional emphasis on students' cultural and moral origins.

Unfortunately, a lot of pesantren instructors don't get the kind of professional development that would help them meet the unique educational demands of Generation Z; instead, they get training that focuses on things like classroom management and grammar (Abdulrahman, 2020). For teachers to meet the challenges of today's classrooms, they need institutional backing, mentorship, and exposure to ELT methods from throughout the world.

4. Importance of Emotions and Motivation in Learning

Affective engagement has a crucial role in determining the performance of Gen Z learners. When students' demands for independence, mastery, and connection are satisfied, intrinsic motivation develops, as postulated by Self-Determination Theory (Afna, 2024). It is especially crucial to strike a balance between these needs in pesantren, where group control can restrict independent courses that include humor, emotional support, and collaborative tasks, which motivate students more, according to research (Gimbert, 2023). On the other hand, courses that are too rigorous prevent students from participating and being creative. Because of this, it is clear that successful pedagogy integrates emotional connection with instructional expertise; teachers' emotional intelligence is thus critical for making the classroom a positive place for students to learn.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate how English teachers in pesantren adapt their pedagogical strategies to accommodate the learning characteristics of Generation Z students. A qualitative approach was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers' instructional practices, students' learning experiences, and the contextual challenges of English language teaching in faith-based educational settings. The descriptive design enabled the researcher to systematically interpret pedagogical adaptation practices within natural classroom contexts.

The research was conducted at three Indonesian pesantren: Darul Fikri, Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, and Ibnu Qoyyim. These institutions were purposively selected based on their English program implementation, institutional characteristics, and varying levels of technological

accessibility. The participants consisted of six English teachers and eighteen students selected through purposive sampling based on teaching experience, familiarity with Generation Z learning characteristics, and student engagement in English learning activities.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Teacher interviews explored instructional strategies, classroom management, and perceptions of Gen Z learners, while student interviews examined learning experiences and engagement patterns. Classroom observations were conducted three times in each school to capture authentic classroom interaction, and field notes were used to record teaching and learning activities. Institutional documents, including lesson plans and syllabi, were also analyzed to understand curricular orientation.

The instruments included interview guides, observation checklists, and document analysis sheets developed from relevant literature and research objectives. To ensure validity, the instruments were reviewed by experts in English education and piloted before data collection. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis with a hybrid coding approach that combined deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes were derived from the research objectives, while inductive coding allowed new themes to emerge from the data. Initial codes such as “visual learning preference,” “use of games,” “teacher humor,” and “limited technology” were identified and grouped into broader categories, including pedagogical adaptation, emotional engagement, and institutional constraints. These categories were subsequently refined into major themes aligned with the research objectives. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation and member checking were conducted to validate the accuracy and consistency of the interpretations.

Result

1. Learning Behaviors of Gen Z Learners

The first significant finding of this research demonstrates that Generation Z learners in Islamic boarding schools bring a distinct set of cognitive, social, and emotional characteristics to their English learning experiences. Although their environment restricts direct access to technology, their learning behaviors remain profoundly shaped by the digital culture that defines their generation. This finding was consistently observed across the three pesantren, including Darul Fikri, Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, and Ibnu Qoyyim, where teachers and students equally described a growing awareness of the need for interactive, meaningful, and emotionally supportive learning.

a) Digital Cognition and Learning Attitudes

Students in the three pesantren displayed learning characteristics typically linked to Generation Z, particularly a stronger preference for interactive, visual, and experience-based learning activities rather than lengthy text-oriented instruction. Teachers observed that students became more attentive and actively engaged when English lessons involved games, storytelling, role-play, competitions, printed images, and activities resembling social media interaction, such as caption creation and short talk-show performances. These instructional strategies not only increased classroom participation but also helped reduce students’ fear of learning English, fostering greater self-confidence and communicative engagement. During the interviews, a student from Darul Fikri stated:

“When the teacher uses games or pictures, I understand faster. It renders the English language engaging, rather than something to be feared.”

Similarly, at Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, students disclosed that they learned best through dynamic and visual approaches, even though gadgets were prohibited. A teacher reflected,

“They like it when I bring printed pictures or short videos from YouTube that I downloaded before. They become more active and confident.”

The findings suggest that Gen Z learners in pesantren contexts process information more effectively when instruction is delivered through multimodal and socially interactive experiences.

In this study, “digital cognition” refers to the tendency of digitally oriented learners to prefer rapid information processing, visual stimulation, immediate feedback, and interactive engagement shaped by continuous exposure to digital environments. Although access to technology was institutionally restricted, students continued to display these cognitive tendencies within classroom interactions. This indicates that digital cognition is not solely dependent on the physical use of technology but also influences learners’ expectations, attention patterns, and engagement strategies in low-technology educational settings.

Pedagogically, these learning behaviors have important implications for English language acquisition. Interactive and multimodal activities created more opportunities for communicative language use, vocabulary retention, peer collaboration, and contextual understanding compared to traditional grammar-focused instruction. Conversely, teacher-centered approaches that relied heavily on memorization and lengthy explanation often reduced students’ attention and active participation, potentially limiting communicative competence and learner motivation. These findings align with recent studies arguing that Generation Z learners respond more positively to experiential and multimodal learning environments because such approaches support engagement, immediate reinforcement, and active meaning-making in language learning processes, (Safitri, 2024; Amin & Aman, 2025). Even in low-tech Islamic boarding school environments, this cognitive pattern persists as students transfer their digital expectations into classroom behavior, expecting immediate engagement and feedback from teachers.

b) Preference for Experiential and Contextual Learning

Across the three pesantren, students consistently emphasized the importance of relevance in their English learning. They found lessons more memorable when they were connected to daily life in the pesantren, such as describing morning routines, giving directions to the prayer hall, or practicing English during dormitory chores.

A student from Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung shared:

“When we practice English during our daily activities, it feels real. It’s easier to remember and use again.”

Teachers supported this view, explaining that contextual learning encouraged students to see English as a living language rather than a classroom subject. At Ibnu Qoyyim, one teacher described how role-playing common pesantren scenarios like greeting guests or delivering short English *taushiyah* (religious talks), helped students express themselves naturally while reinforcing Islamic values. This preference for contextual learning aligns with constructivist and humanistic pedagogical theories, which emphasize that learners build knowledge more effectively when it connects to their social environment and identity. Furthermore, it validates prior research indicating that Gen Z students value authenticity, purpose, and social impact in their learning experiences (Maqbool et al., 2020).

These findings suggest that Gen Z learners thrive when they perceive a clear connection between language learning and their lived experiences. It also echoes the humanistic view that meaningful learning arises when education touches both the intellectual and emotional dimensions of the learner.

c) Emotional and Affective Learning Dimension

Another powerful finding concerns the emotional environment of the classroom. Students from all three institutions consistently emphasized that instructor attitude and empathy significantly influence their motivation. They appreciated teachers who were patient, humorous, and encouraging, as this made them feel respected and safe to participate.

At Darul Fikri, one student noted:

“Our teacher doesn’t scold us when we make mistakes. She helps us try again, so we are not shy anymore.”

Teachers also recognized the need for emotional intelligence in teaching. A teacher from Ibnu Qoyyim reflected,

“If I use strict discipline, they become quiet. But when I joke a bit or tell a story, suddenly everyone wants to speak English.”

These emotional dynamics highlight the central role of teacher–student rapport in Gen Z pedagogy. In faith-based institutions like pesantren, where values such as humility and respect are emphasized, maintaining warmth and emotional safety aligns naturally with the moral mission of education. This aligns with the findings (Gimbert, 2023), who note that emotional intelligence in teaching fosters higher resilience, self-efficacy, and participation among Gen Z learners. In the pesantren context, emotional rapport also resonates with Islamic educational values emphasizing morality, attitude, and brotherhood.

d) Social and Collaborative Learning Orientation

Group learning emerged as another defining feature of Gen Z engagement. Students showed a strong preference for teamwork and collective learning rather than individual assignments. Teachers across the three pesantren found that peer-based collaboration reduced anxiety, improved communication, and fostered a sense of belonging.

At Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, one English teacher explained,

“They enjoy learning in groups because it feels like a game. They help each other and even correct mistakes together.”

Similarly, at Ibnu Qoyyim, students were observed forming study circles outside of class to practice speaking and share vocabulary lists. This collaborative nature reflects the pesantren’s communal ethos while aligning with global educational theories emphasizing cooperative learning as a driver of engagement and retention. This observation echoes research showing that Gen Z learners perceive learning as a shared experience that fosters both social belonging and collective growth (Akdemir & Akdemir, 2023). In the pesantren ecosystem, where community living is integral, this collaborative tendency becomes even more pronounced.

e) The Paradox of Digital Restriction and Creativity

Perhaps the most fascinating dimension of this finding lies in the tension between students’ digital orientation and the pesantren’s limited technological environment. Despite strict rules against smartphone use, students and teachers found creative ways to simulate digital interactivity through analog means. Teachers used pre-downloaded videos, printed memes, or picture cards to recreate media-like engagement.

A Darul Fikri educator commented:

“Even without the internet, I can bring the outside world into class. The students are excited because it feels different from the usual textbook lesson.”

This resilience reflects what education academics term digital resilience, the ability to maintain engagement and creativity in learning even when technology is limited. Within the pesantren setting, such resilience represents not simply a means of survival but also a form of cultural innovation, integrating contemporary educational psychology with religious discipline. The evidence gathered from interviews and observations conducted across the three institutions indicates that effective English instruction for Generation Z within pesantren environments relies on acknowledging the human aspect of learning—the equilibrium among intellect, emotion, and faith. This adaptation reflects what recent pedagogical research calls *“digital resilience”*—the capacity to sustain digitally inspired learning mindsets even without constant access to technology (Nahdi et al., 2024).

2. Teachers’ Pedagogical Adaptation Strategies

The second significant finding focuses on how English teachers in the three pesantren have adapted their instructional strategies to address the unique learning characteristics of Generation Z students. Although each institution operates under different administrative and cultural structures, a unifying pattern emerges: teachers consistently strive to make learning interactive, contextual, and emotionally engaging despite limited resources. The outcome is a form of context-sensitive pedagogy that integrates innovation with ethical and institutional boundaries.

a) Embracing Gamification and Active Learning

Teachers in all three institutions showed a growing preference for activity-based learning as a means to sustain student attention and motivation. Lessons that incorporated activities, quizzes, or competitions were found to be particularly effective. At Darul Fikri, for example, the

English teacher often used word games and “English Battles” to reinforce vocabulary. During the interview, she explained,

“I have observed that when teachings are transformed into games, even the quieter students engage actively. They enjoy engaging in competition, but in an enjoyable manner.”

Students affirmed this enthusiasm. One of the individuals communicated,

“We wait for English Battle Day because it’s exciting. We learn new words without feeling pressured.”

At Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, teachers adopted a similar approach, adapting traditional drills into interactive group challenges. Rather than lecturing on grammar, instructors designed mini-dialogue competitions and guessing games to keep students involved. A teacher noted,

“When they move and talk, they remember more. I use competition not just for fun, but to help them speak naturally.”

These examples show that gamification is not merely an entertaining supplement but a purposeful strategy that aligns with Gen Z’s preference for immediacy, participation, and engagement. It transforms classrooms into spaces of joyful learning while maintaining discipline and moral focus. These findings are consistent with the research of (Zhan, 2022), which concluded that integrating playful tasks enhances the attention span and social involvement of Generation Z learners.

b) Collaborative and Peer-Based Learning

Another adaptation observed across the three pesantren is the emphasis on collaborative learning. Teachers structured activities that encouraged pair work, small group assignments, and peer teaching. This approach not only facilitated communication practice but also reflected the pesantren’s communal culture.

At Ibnu Qoyyim, students frequently worked in small groups to perform dialogues, share vocabulary, and complete reading exercises. One student commented,

“When we learn together, we’re not afraid of mistakes. We help each other, and it’s more fun.”

Teachers confirmed that peer learning reduced performance anxiety and created a sense of belonging. In Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, a teacher explained,

“Group work builds confidence. They learn from each other’s mistakes, and it feels less formal.”

This pedagogical approach supports the findings of socio-constructivist theories, which emphasize that learning is a social process built through interaction. In pesantren contexts, it also mirrors the traditional “*halaqah*” (study circle) method, making it culturally resonant as well as pedagogically effective. This demonstrates that collaborative learning not only facilitates communicative competence but also strengthens social bonding within the pesantren community. The strategy aligns with socio-constructivist theories, which argue that knowledge is best built through shared experiences and dialogue. A similar conclusion was drawn by (Zhang, 2022; Chen, 2021), who found that group learning increases engagement and mutual accountability among digital era students even in environments with minimal technology access.

c) Contextualizing English with Islamic and Everyday Themes

Perhaps the most distinctive pedagogical adaptation among pesantren teachers was their effort to contextualize English instruction within Islamic values and students’ daily religious experiences. Rather than presenting English merely as an abstract linguistic skill, teachers connected lessons to familiar spiritual practices, moral behaviors, and routines within pesantren life. At Darul Fikri, for example, students practiced English dialogues related to wudu (ablution) and mosque etiquette, while teachers at Ibnu Qoyyim introduced English expressions associated with discipline, gratitude, and ethical conduct. Teachers explained that these contextualized approaches increased students’ participation because learners perceived English not as a foreign or culturally distant subject, but as a meaningful medium through which they could express their identity as Muslim students.

This finding highlights a distinctive contribution of the pesantren-based pedagogical model within English language teaching research. Unlike many mainstream ELT approaches that prioritize communicative competence primarily through global or secular content, the pesantren model integrates language learning with identity formation and spiritual values. The integration of religiously grounded content appeared to strengthen students' sense of belonging and self-concept by allowing them to negotiate their identities simultaneously as English learners and committed Muslims. In this context, English learning was not viewed as a threat to local or religious identity but as a tool that could support religious expression, moral development, and participation in a globalized world without abandoning Islamic values.

Pedagogically, this integration also influenced students' motivational orientation toward English learning. When instructional materials reflected students' lived experiences and religious environment, learners demonstrated stronger emotional engagement, greater classroom participation, and reduced anxiety toward using English. The relevance of the content appeared to foster more intrinsic and value-based motivation because students perceived English as personally meaningful rather than merely an academic requirement. This finding supports previous research suggesting that culturally and spiritually responsive pedagogy can enhance learner engagement and motivation in faith-based educational contexts (Megahed, 2022), which observed that teachers in faith-based schools often adopt hybrid approaches that blend modern media with moral discipline.

In addition to contextualized instruction, teachers across the three pesantren demonstrated strong emotional and affective strategies as part of their pedagogical adaptation. Teachers recognized that Generation Z learners responded positively to humor, empathy, encouragement, and emotionally supportive classroom interaction. Storytelling, motivational advice, and light humor were frequently used to maintain students' attention and create a psychologically safe learning environment. Students reported feeling more confident speaking English when teachers created relaxed and supportive classroom atmospheres. These socio-affective strategies played an important role in reducing learning anxiety and encouraging communicative participation, particularly in environments where students often feared making mistakes in English.

The findings further indicate that emotional responsiveness in pesantren classrooms extends beyond classroom management and functions as a form of learner-centered pedagogy grounded in relational trust and moral guidance. In the pesantren context, emotional support does not weaken teacher authority; instead, it reinforces respectful relationships between teachers and students while maintaining moral discipline. This balance between emotional closeness and ethical guidance represents another distinctive aspect of pesantren pedagogy. Consistent with studies on Generation Z learning psychology, the findings suggest that emotionally responsive and contextually meaningful instruction contributes significantly to maintaining student motivation, engagement, and collaborative learning behavior (Vistorte, 2024).

d) Emotional and Affective Strategies

Across all three institutions, teachers demonstrated emotional intelligence as a crucial pedagogical skill. They understood that Gen Z learners respond strongly to teacher attitude, humor, and empathy. Teachers used storytelling, motivational talk, and humor to maintain a supportive atmosphere.

At Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, one teacher shared:

"Sometimes they get tired or bored. I tell a story or make a small joke, and instantly they smile and focus again."

At Ibnu Qoyyim, a student echoed this sentiment:

"When our teacher jokes, it feels comfortable. We don't feel afraid to speak English."

Similar to studies on Gen Z learning psychology, these socio-affective tactics emphasize relational ties and emotional safety as important engagement motivators. These tactics take on more importance in the pesantren context since they foster trust while preserving the moral authority of the teacher. This indicates that educators are starting to embrace learner-centered ideas, acknowledging the uniqueness of every student. In addition to improving learning fairness,

this kind of differentiation fortifies collaboration and social empathy. According to recent studies, kids in Generation Z benefit from individualized instruction in terms of maintaining motivation and lowering learning anxiety (Vistorte, 2024).

e) Adaptable and Reflective Practice

A further dimension of adaptation observed among pesantren teachers is flexibility. Teachers frequently revised lesson plans mid-class based on student feedback and energy levels. When students appeared disengaged, teachers replaced reading assignments with interactive speaking activities.

A Darul Fikri educator commented,

"I can't follow the lesson plan too strictly. If they're fatigued, I change the activity. The objective is learning, not just finishing the plan."

This reflective approach exhibits a comprehensive understanding of student-centered pedagogy. It demonstrates that teachers have moved beyond traditional lecturing to a more responsive form of teaching—an indicator of pedagogical maturity and adaptability.

Overall, the educators at Darul Fikri, Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, and Ibnu Qoyyim demonstrate a remarkable ability to innovate within limitations. Their pedagogical adaptations reflect both a commitment to student engagement and a sensitivity to institutional values. Through gamification, collaboration, contextualization, and emotional rapport, they have devised a pedagogy that bridges the generational divide between traditional pesantren discipline and the learning psychology of Gen Z.

These findings indicate that effective instruction in Islamic boarding institutions is not constrained by technological limitations but is enhanced through creativity and empathy. Teachers' ability to humanize instruction within moral boundaries demonstrates how pedagogical evolution can flourish even in modest educational environments. These findings illustrated by (Hanif, 2025; Maqbool, 2020) that affective engagement acts as a powerful driver of Gen Z learning success.

3. Institutional and Environmental Limitations in Pedagogical Innovation

While teachers in the three pesantren demonstrated creativity and resilience in their instructional methods, their efforts often unfolded within a network of institutional and environmental constraints. These limitations—ranging from rigid curricula to resource scarcity—deeply influence how pedagogical innovation can be implemented and sustained. Yet, despite these constraints, teachers continually negotiate spaces for adaptation, demonstrating that even within restrictive settings, meaningful educational transformation is possible.

a) Curricular Rigidity and Administrative Control

One of the most frequently identified challenges across the three pesantren was the rigidity of the institutional curriculum. English instruction was often positioned as secondary to religious subjects, which were regarded as the core foundation of pesantren identity and educational goals. As a result, teachers had limited autonomy to modify learning materials, extend communicative activities, or implement innovative teaching strategies. Teachers reported that strict schedules dominated by fiqh, hadith, and other religious studies reduced the time available for English instruction, often resulting in fragmented and compressed lessons.

This curricular rigidity had important pedagogical consequences for both teachers and students. From the students' perspective, limited instructional time constrained opportunities for communicative practice, collaborative interaction, and sustained exposure to English, all of which are essential for developing speaking confidence, learner engagement, and communicative competence. The dominance of content coverage over interactive learning also risked reinforcing teacher-centered instruction, which may not fully accommodate the experiential and multimodal learning preferences associated with Generation Z learners. Consequently, students' motivation and active participation could decline when English learning was perceived as disconnected, rushed, or academically secondary within the institutional structure.

At Darul Fikri, a teacher candidly articulated this challenge:

"We are required to adhere to the curriculum established by the pesantren foundation. Occasionally, I wish to undertake additional creative endeavors; however, there is insufficient time remaining after religious classes."

A comparable sentiment was expressed at Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, where an educator observed that lesson planning frequently emphasized *'fiqh'* and *hadith* classes, resulting in brief and disjointed English sessions. The principal affirmed this tension:

"Our objective is to equip students for both the worldly life and the hereafter. But because of that, English courses must fit within a tight schedule."

From the teachers' perspective, the findings reveal a tension between institutional control and pedagogical autonomy. Although teachers recognized the importance of adapting instruction to students' needs, their ability to innovate was constrained by administrative expectations, fixed curricular targets, and limited flexibility in lesson scheduling. This reflects broader concerns raised by (J. E. Liu, 2020), who argues that rigid systems can inhibit teachers' creativity, especially when dealing with learners who require flexibility and experiential engagement.

Despite these constraints, teachers demonstrated adaptive strategies to negotiate institutional limitations without directly challenging pesantren structures. Some educators implemented micro-level curriculum adjustments by integrating communicative activities, games, storytelling, or contextual discussions into short lesson segments while still following institutional guidelines. Others used flexible lesson planning, combining religious themes with English instruction to make learning more relevant and efficient within restricted classroom time. These negotiated teaching practices illustrate that pedagogical innovation in pesantren contexts often occurs through gradual adaptation rather than structural transformation. The findings therefore suggest that effective English instruction in faith-based institutions depends not only on curricular flexibility but also on teachers' capacity to creatively balance institutional expectations, religious values, and the learning needs of Generation Z students.

b) Restricted Access to Digital Resources

Another pressing challenge is the limited access to digital learning materials. Although Generation Z students are typically proficient with technology, the utilization of smartphones, computers, and the internet is frequently limited within pesantren environments to uphold discipline and emphasize spiritual growth.

At Ibnu Qoyyim, the English instructor emphasized this limitation:

"We cannot freely use smartphones in class, and we only have one shared computer for teachers. Therefore, I print all materials—images, exercises, and even songs—to enhance the engagement of the class."

In Darul Fikri, some students expressed frustration over this digital limitation. A single student remarked,

"We see videos and games in English at home, but here, we can't use them. It presents a distinct sensation."

To bridge this divide, educators utilize analog methods of creativity, incorporating visual aids, storytelling, and group simulations to replicate the engagement typically facilitated by digital tools. Interestingly, this limitation has stimulated pedagogical innovation. As an educator observed,

"Because we can't rely on technology, we must rely on ourselves—our voice, our creativity, our connection with students."

This sentiment emphasizes a profound principle: authentic engagement can arise from human connection and ingenuity, rather than solely from technology. This finding supports the argument by (Amin & Aman, 2025), who noted that pesantren education faces a critical challenge in reconciling traditional discipline with digital integration. While technology restrictions protect moral values, they can also reduce students' exposure to authentic linguistic input and global perspectives that are crucial for modern language learning.

c) Institutional Culture and Attitudes Toward Innovation

The institutional culture of pesantren significantly influences educators' perspectives on innovation. In many cases, teachers are cautious about implementing new techniques that might appear to challenge tradition. The hierarchical character of pesantren governance, where senior *kyai* (religious leaders) hold strong authority, can discourage experimental pedagogy.

At Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, one teacher shared:

"Sometimes innovation is seen as too modern or not appropriate. It is important to clarify that engaging in games or role play remains consistent with Islamic principles."

Meanwhile, at Darul Fikri, the teacher adopted a more receptive attitude towards innovation, contingent upon its alignment with moral teachings. The substantial influence of institutional openness on pedagogical reform. Pesantren that regard modernization as a complement to moral education tend to promote more dynamic classroom practices (Rahman et al., 2023).

d) Heavy Workload and Multifunctional Roles of Teachers

Another persistent challenge is the substantial workload assigned to instructors. In pesantren, educators frequently serve simultaneously as dormitory supervisors, moral guides, and administrative personnel. This complex role affords limited opportunities for preparation or introspection.

At Ibnu Qoyyim, an instructor acknowledged:

"After instructing, we are still responsible for supervising students in the dormitory, providing guidance for their devotion, and participating in meetings. Occasionally, I prepare my lessons during the nighttime hours, when all others are slumbering."

Educators at Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung expressed comparable concerns, highlighting that weariness frequently hampers their capacity to incorporate new materials or innovative methods. This situation underscores the importance of institutional backing and ongoing professional development—resources that are frequently neglected in religious educational institutions.

Despite these obstacles, educators persist in exhibiting dedication and flexibility. Their readiness to innovate, even when under pressure, demonstrates a sense of vocational dedication rather than simple conformity. This moral motivation is closely aligned with the spiritual ethos of the pesantren, transforming teaching into both a vocation and an act of spiritual dedication (Asyifa, 2022).

e) Limited Exposure to an Authentic English Environment

A final constraint concerns the lack of real-world exposure to English use beyond the classroom. Since pesantren environments are primarily focused on religious and communal activities, opportunities for students to practice English in natural contexts are rare. Teachers mentioned that while "English Day" programs exist, their implementation is inconsistent.

A teacher from Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung mentioned:

"We try to make every Friday an English Day, but many students forget to use English after class."

Students also expressed that they rarely use English outside of learning sessions. One student said:

"We only speak English in class, not in the dormitory or with friends, because it feels strange."

This finding shows that despite teachers' efforts, the broader institutional culture does not yet fully support sustained English communication. The environment remains dominated by Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic, making English practice isolated to formal lessons. Such limited exposure prevents learners from internalizing language use as a natural skill, which is particularly important for Generation Z, who prefer active, real-time communication and contextual learning experiences (Njonge, 2023).

4. Students' Responses Toward Teachers' Pedagogical Strategies

Beyond the difficulties related to curriculum, resources, and institutional culture, the most significant aspect identified in this study is the affective and relational dimension of teaching. For

educators engaging with Generation Z students in pesantren, success frequently hinges less on technical proficiency or digital resources and more on the capacity to establish an affective connection with students. The data indicate that successful teaching in this context necessitates profound empathy, forbearance, and a commitment to engaging learners as complete human beings—intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

a) Establishing Emotional Bonds as an Effective Pedagogical Approach

Teachers across the three pesantren uniformly underscored that emotional rapport constitutes the fundamental basis of effective learning. In a setting regulated by rules and religious discipline, a teacher's humanity, attentiveness, and sense of humor can profoundly impact student motivation and engagement.

At Darul Fikri, an English instructor shared that the most effective method to commence a lesson is simply by engaging in a conversation with them inquiring about their emotions and aspirations. When individuals feel acknowledged, they become more receptive to engaging in learning. This statement demonstrates that emotive connection serves as both an educational approach and a catalyst for motivation. Teacher who humanize their classrooms cultivate trust, thereby diminishing anxiety and establishing a more conducive environment for language acquisition.

Similarly, at Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, one of the teachers explained how amusement and storytelling serve a significant function in alleviating tension:

"English presents challenges for many students; therefore, I share brief stories, either humorous or motivational. They enjoy laughter, experience relaxation, and subsequently engage in learning without any undue pressure."

These minor acts of emotional engagement frequently serve to reconcile the divide between conventional authority and contemporary learner expectations, fostering a sense among students that their voices and emotions are valued within the classroom. This aligns with findings by (Rahayu & Fitriani, 2022), who emphasized that socio-affective strategies such as emotional reinforcement and encouragement significantly enhance students' willingness to communicate in English. Similarly, (Sari & Yulia, 2023) found that positive teacher-student rapport directly influences classroom participation and sustained interest among adolescent learners.

In the pesantren context, where discipline and respect are core values, these emotionally sensitive teaching practices humanize the learning experience and bridge the generational gap between educators and digital-native students.

b) Appreciation for Interactive and Contextual Learning Activities

The interviews further indicated that mutual respect is fundamental to the affective dynamics within pesantren education. Contrary to the prevalent view of pesantren as hierarchical entities, the findings suggest that many instructors aim to foster reciprocal relationships characterized by mutual respect.

One of the teachers from Ibnu Qoyyim articulated this sentiment eloquently:

"We hold all teachers in high regard because they also show us respect. They never cause us to feel insignificant. Educators, in turn, regard this mutual exchange as the fundamental basis of classroom harmony."

A teacher from Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung observed:

"When students trust you, they pay attention not out of fear of punishment, but because they value the relationship."

This interpersonal trust allows educators to uphold discipline without resorting to severe measures. Instead, they depend on dialogue, empathy, and individualized guidance approaches that are consistent with the pesantren's philosophy of moral development. This finding resonates with (Putra et al., 2022), who observed that interactive and contextual learning environments significantly enhance Gen Z students' retention and critical thinking in language learning. Similarly, (Mahmud & Hidayati, 2023) argue that contextual teaching, when aligned with cultural and moral values, helps learners internalize both linguistic competence and ethical awareness. Teachers' efforts to incorporate Islamic expressions and pesantren routines into English lessons are

particularly valued. This practice not only strengthens relevance but also reinforces cultural identity. It shows that innovation in Islamic education can coexist harmoniously with tradition.

c) Desire for More Multimedia and Technological Exposure

Although students appreciated teachers' creativity, many expressed a strong desire for more technology-based learning experiences. Several students noted that they learn effectively through visual and auditory media, but such exposure remains limited due to pesantren regulations.

A student from Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung explained:

"I want to watch English videos or listen to songs, but we cannot use phones here. It would help us to understand pronunciation better."

Another student from Darul Fikri added:

"We use printed pictures, which are nice, but it is different when you see real videos or play interactive games."

These responses reveal a gap between students' digital learning preferences and the analog reality of pesantren education. The findings indicate that Gen Z learners are naturally multimodal, thriving on dynamic, fast-paced content that engages multiple senses. This aligns with research by (Fauzi & Aulia, 2021), which found that the integration of multimedia in English instruction improves listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and learner satisfaction among Indonesian high school students. Similarly, (Wahyuni et al., 2023) demonstrated that students' motivation and focus increase significantly when teachers incorporate digital storytelling and audio-visual resources. While teachers in this study simulate digital engagement through offline materials, students' remarks suggest that limited technology access remains a significant motivational barrier. The implication is that supervised and ethical digital exposure could serve as an effective pedagogical bridge between tradition and innovation.

d) Critical Views on Repetitive and Rote-Based Learning

Despite overall satisfaction with teachers' efforts, some students expressed boredom with repetitive grammar exercises and memorization tasks. They perceived such methods as outdated and less stimulating.

A student from Ibnu Qoyyim stated:

"Sometimes we only repeat grammar and vocabulary. It feels boring because we cannot use it in a real conversation."

Another from Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung said:

"I like it when we talk or act in front of the class, not when we just copy notes."

These observations highlight that Gen Z learners prefer active participation over passive reception. They value learning that promotes creativity, expression, and collaboration. Their dissatisfaction with rote methods confirms a generational shift in motivation patterns from obedience-based to curiosity-driven engagement.

This finding is consistent with, who reported that traditional grammar-translation methods demotivate students and fail to stimulate higher-order thinking. It is also supported by (French, 2020), who advocate for transformative pedagogies that emphasize experiential learning to align with Gen Z's interactive learning style.

e) Recognition of Teachers' Efforts and Empathy Toward Institutional Challenge

An interesting insight emerging from the interviews is that students are aware of their teachers' challenges and express empathy toward the limitations imposed by institutional rules.

A student from Darul Fikri remarked:

"Our teacher tries hard to make us enjoy English, even without technology. I know it is not easy for them."

Similarly, a student from Ibnu Qoyyim mentioned:

"Sometimes we feel sorry for the teachers because they are busy, but they still smile and teach us patiently."

This mutual understanding between teachers and students creates a positive social climate that supports learning. It shows that pedagogical success in pesantren is not only a matter of

teaching method but also relational ethics grounded in respect and sincerity. Such empathy-based relationships strengthen student motivation and foster a collaborative classroom culture. This observation aligns with (Pun, 2020; Hasbi et al., 2024) who assert that emotional empathy and mutual respect between teachers and students enhance learning persistence and interpersonal trust.

Discussion

Understanding Gen Z Learners in Pesantren Contexts

Although previous research has widely discussed Generation Z pedagogy and English Language Teaching in secular and technology-rich educational settings, limited attention has been given to how these pedagogical approaches are adapted within faith-based institutions such as pesantren. Existing studies predominantly emphasize digital integration, multimedia learning, and technology-enhanced instruction, while the pedagogical negotiation between communicative English teaching and religious educational values remains underexplored. Furthermore, little is known about how teachers in pesantren contexts sustain learner engagement and communicative participation despite limited technological resources and institutional restrictions. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by examining how English teachers adapt their pedagogical strategies to accommodate Generation Z learners while simultaneously maintaining the moral and spiritual identity of pesantren education..

The findings demonstrate that despite these restrictions, students at Darul Fikri, Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, and Ibnu Qoyyim show high enthusiasm when English lessons are interactive, emotionally supportive, and culturally meaningful. This indicates that pedagogical success with Gen Z learners depends less on technological sophistication and more on relational engagement and contextual relevance. The results, therefore, affirm that the essence of Gen Z pedagogy lies in fostering a sense of connection and purpose rather than mere digital immersion.

Teacher Adaptation and Professional Reflexivity

Teachers across the three pesantren showed remarkable flexibility in designing learning experiences that met the cognitive and emotional needs of Gen Z students while remaining faithful to pesantren values. They used strategies such as gamification, collaborative learning, context-based instruction, and emotional support to make lessons more engaging and meaningful. For example, at Darul Fikri, teachers often organized group tasks that encouraged students to discuss and solve problems together, while at Hidayatullah Bangka Belitung, storytelling and role play were used to help students express emotions and understand cultural contexts. These strategies reflect (Muslem et al., 2022) emphasis on the importance of socio-affective interaction in second language learning for younger generations.

The teachers' approach also reflects what (Wahyuningsih, 2025) conceptualizes as faith integrated pedagogy, an instructional approach that differs from general contextual or culturally responsive teaching because it intentionally integrates spiritual values, religious identity, and moral formation into the learning process. While contextual pedagogy primarily adapts learning materials to students' sociocultural backgrounds and daily experiences, faith integrated pedagogy goes further by positioning religious and ethical principles as central components of instructional design and classroom interaction. In the pesantren context, English is therefore not taught merely as a global communication tool but also as a medium through which students negotiate their religious identity and moral values.

By incorporating Islamic values into English lessons through moral narratives, religious expressions, reflective discussions, and examples derived from daily pesantren life, teachers connected students' linguistic development with their spiritual and cultural identity. At Ibnu Qoyyim, for example, reflective learning activities encouraged students to apply English skills while simultaneously engaging with ethical and religious themes, creating a learning environment that was both intellectually and spiritually meaningful. This approach not only enhanced students' communicative competence and classroom participation but also increased their motivation by making English learning personally relevant and culturally meaningful.

Furthermore, faith integrated pedagogy influenced students' identity formation as both English language learners and Muslim individuals. Students gradually perceived English not as a representation of external cultural values that might threaten their religious identity, but as a communicative resource compatible with Islamic principles and pesantren culture. In this way, the integration of faith based values into English instruction preserved the moral integrity of pesantren education while simultaneously fostering students' confidence, engagement, and meaningful participation in learning English as a global language.

A distinctive feature of the teachers' practice is their professional reflexivity. They frequently adjusted lesson plans based on student engagement, moving to lighter, more interactive activities when learners appeared bored or tired. This shift away from rigid textbook-centered instruction toward adaptive, student-responsive teaching demonstrates their attentiveness to the needs and moods of Gen Z learners. For example, when a planned grammar exercise failed to capture interest, teachers quickly introduced games or discussions that connected the lesson to real-life experiences, keeping students motivated and involved.

These reflective practices highlight a broader trend toward learner-centered pedagogy that is emerging globally among educators working with Generation Z (Rahman et al., 2023). In the pesantren context, this reflexivity shows that teachers are not only adapting to generational changes but also creating a localized model of pedagogical innovation. By blending modern teaching strategies with faith-based principles, they craft an environment where students can develop academically, socially, and spiritually.

Institutional Challenges and Creative Resilience

Although teachers actively adapted their pedagogy to accommodate Generation Z learners, institutional and environmental constraints continued to shape the effectiveness of English instruction in pesantren contexts. Restrictions on gadget use and limited digital infrastructure reduced opportunities for technology-based learning, limiting students' exposure to authentic English input, interactive multimedia resources, and communicative language practice commonly associated with Generation Z learning preferences. In addition, heavy teaching workloads, rigid institutional schedules, and large class sizes constrained teachers' ability to design individualized and highly interactive learning experiences, which potentially affected student engagement, motivation, and active participation in English learning.

Nevertheless, rather than perceiving these limitations solely as barriers, teachers demonstrated pedagogical resilience and creativity by substituting digital tools with printed visuals, paper-based games, storytelling, collaborative discussion, and role-play activities. These adaptations suggest that educational innovation in pesantren settings is not determined exclusively by technological availability but also by teachers' capacity to create meaningful and contextually responsive learning environments. At the same time, the findings indicate that structural limitations may still restrict the development of communicative competence and learner autonomy, particularly when students have limited access to sustained interactive exposure to English beyond the classroom. This highlights the complex relationship between institutional culture, resource limitations, and pedagogical effectiveness in faith-based educational contexts.

These findings align with (Rahman et al., 2023; Nahdi et al., 2024), who observed that educators in resource-limited Islamic schools frequently develop analog strategies that replicate the engagement of digital media. Techniques such as visual storytelling, collaborative problem-solving, and kinesthetic activities successfully simulated the interactive qualities of multimedia learning. This approach illustrates what can be described as "digital resilience" to uphold the engagement principles favored by Gen Z learners even in environments with limited technology.

Students' Responses and Cognitive Engagement

Students' responses in this study reinforced the value of interactive and emotionally supportive teaching strategies. They appreciated teachers who were empathetic, patient, and humorous, qualities that reduced anxiety and encouraged them to communicate in English more freely. These observations support (Tsai, 2020), who emphasizes the centrality of emotional rapport in fostering Gen Z engagement. The emphasis on kindness and support resonates with the

pesantren principle of compassion, demonstrating how affective pedagogy naturally aligns with Islamic moral education.

Students also valued lessons that connected English learning to their daily lives and religious experiences. Activities that incorporated English expressions for prayer routines, dormitory interactions, and community responsibilities made the language practical and spiritually relevant. This confirms (Madkur et al., 2024) findings that contextualized learning enhances motivation in faith-based schools. Conversely, students reported disengagement when lessons relied too heavily on rote grammar exercises, highlighting that traditional, repetitive approaches fail to meet the expectations of Gen Z learners. Despite expressing a desire for more multimedia exposure, students deeply appreciated their teachers' dedication. Their acknowledgment reflects the moral respect embedded in pesantren culture and underscores how reciprocal empathy strengthens the affective bonds that underpin effective learning.

This integrated approach aligns with broader trends in contemporary education, particularly culturally sustaining pedagogy and humanistic teaching models (Garzón, 2020). However, what distinguishes the pesantren-based pedagogical model from most existing Gen Z-oriented ELT approaches is its integration of communicative learning with moral and spiritual formation. Unlike many mainstream ELT models that primarily emphasize digital engagement and technological innovation, the pesantren model demonstrates that effective pedagogy for Generation Z learners can also emerge through emotional connection, contextual relevance, collaborative interaction, and faith-based values. In this context, classroom engagement is not viewed solely as a cognitive process but also as a means of shaping students' character, identity, and ethical awareness as Muslim learners in a globalized world.

This study therefore contributes to the theoretical understanding of English language teaching in faith-based educational environments by proposing a pedagogical framework that integrates linguistic, emotional, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of learning. Practically, the findings provide insights for educators working in similarly resource-limited or religious educational contexts, showing that meaningful educational innovation does not always depend on advanced technology but can also be achieved through compassionate teaching, contextualized instruction, and moral alignment. The study further highlights the importance of developing pedagogical models that are not only technologically responsive to Generation Z learners but also culturally and spiritually grounded.

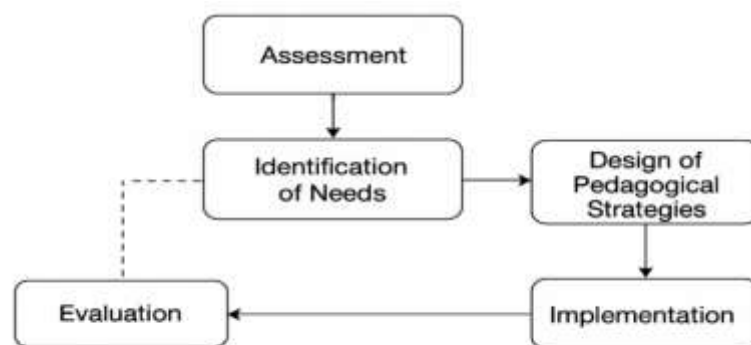


Figure 1. Pedagogical Adaptation Process for Generation Z Learners in Pesantren Contexts

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that English teachers in pesantren possess a strong awareness of the learning characteristics of Generation Z students, particularly their preference for interactive, visually engaging, and meaningful learning experiences. At the same time, teachers remain committed to preserving the moral and spiritual values that define pesantren education. Rather than relying solely on technology-driven instruction, teachers adapted their pedagogy through

contextually relevant and emotionally responsive practices that fostered student engagement, communicative participation, and collaborative learning despite institutional limitations such as restricted digital access and rigid curricular structures.

It can be known from the findings indicate that emotional intelligence plays a central role in effective English pedagogy within pesantren contexts. Students responded more positively to teachers who demonstrated empathy, patience, humor, and emotional sensitivity during classroom interaction. This finding is particularly significant in pesantren education because teacher–student relationships are strongly shaped by religious and moral values emphasizing respect, compassion, discipline, and ethical guidance. In such environments, teachers are not perceived merely as instructors but also as moral mentors who influence students' character formation and spiritual development. Consequently, emotionally supportive interaction contributes not only to students' language learning confidence and communicative participation but also to the creation of psychologically safe learning environments that align with pesantren educational values.

The study further demonstrates that meaningful educational transformation in faith based institutions can emerge through the integration of modern pedagogical principles with cultural and spiritual values. Rather than depending exclusively on technological innovation, effective English instruction in pesantren contexts is sustained through relational engagement, contextual relevance, and emotionally responsive teaching practices. These findings extend existing ELT scholarship by highlighting the importance of emotional and spiritual dimensions in Generation Z pedagogy within faith based educational settings.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest the need for continuous professional development programs that equip teachers with context sensitive instructional strategies, emotionally responsive classroom management skills, collaborative learning techniques, and faith integrated communicative approaches. In addition, institutional policies should support the ethical and supervised integration of digital resources to enhance communicative competence and learner engagement while preserving the moral and spiritual principles of pesantren education.

In the future, researchers could investigate how these adaptable teaching techniques affect students' long-term language skills, independence, and character development of characters. This study demonstrates that when innovation and tradition are combined, English training in pesantren can succeed. Generation Z students can improve their morals and intellectual growth by combining modern teaching methods with spiritual and cultural guidance. This will give them the tools they need to succeed in a globalized world while staying true to their faith and values.

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