

Learning for Generation Alpha in Early Character Development: A Case Study

Azzahro' Salsa Annabila^{1✉}, Nompumelelo Pricilla Madonda², Udem Samuel Jacob³, Raina Aulia⁴, Fanny Saskiyah⁵, Fiddini Nurul Aini⁶, Rizka Ni'mathush Solehah⁷

¹⁴⁵⁶⁷Universitas Trunojoyo Madura, Indonesia

²University of Pretoria, South Africa

³University of Johannesburg, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Background of the study: Early childhood (ages 0–6) is considered the golden age of human development, when children can easily absorb and imitate knowledge from their surroundings. At this critical stage, character education is vital and should be implemented by both teachers and parents as primary educators. Character formation is shaped not only by genetic factors but also by environmental influences, particularly education. Consistent and systematic character education fosters positive values that can last into adulthood.

Aims and scope of paper: This paper examines strategies for stimulating character education in Generation Alpha students at TK Hang Tuah 13, focusing on the roles of teachers and parents. It explores four core methods and twelve specific strategies for early childhood character formation, integrating theoretical foundations with practical insights from field interviews.

Methods: Using a qualitative case study design, the research involved teachers, students, and parents selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered over three months via in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, supported by field notes and audio recordings. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's framework, with trustworthiness ensured through member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation.

Results: Character education at TK Hang Tuah 13 is implemented holistically, guided by the Buku 9 Pilar Karakter and the K4 concept. Values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, independence, creativity, cooperation, tolerance, and nationalism are instilled through daily habituation, role modeling, structured projects, and outdoor activities. Findings show growth in moral, performance, and social character. The program positively impacted both school and home environments, supported by strong collaboration between teachers and parents.

Contribution: The study offers a structured framework for Generation Alpha character education, bridging theory and practice. It underscores the importance of sustained school–home partnerships in shaping children's moral and social values during the formative years.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a fundamental role in shaping children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. This period is often referred to as the "golden age" of human growth because children's capacity to absorb and imitate knowledge, values, and behaviors is exceptionally high (Rahman, 2002). Education at this stage should therefore go beyond the mere transmission of academic content. It must also focus on fostering ethics, mindsets, and essential life skills that serve as a strong foundation for children to grow into independent, resilient, and morally grounded individuals. The ability to adapt to changing environments, solve problems creatively, and collaborate effectively in the future is largely determined by the quality of learning and character formation that takes place during early childhood (Domínguez et al., 2024; Lam et al., 2025; Pietropoli & Gracia, 2025; Setyowati et al., 2023). Consequently, the long-term success of human resource development is inseparable from the quality and relevance of early childhood education.

However, in actual practice, the learning process in many early childhood institutions remains monotonous, heavily teacher-centered, and less responsive to the diversity of children's learning styles. Every child learns differently—some grasp concepts more effectively through visual representation, others through auditory explanation, and still others through kinesthetic or hands-on activities (Madeleine et al., 2024; Otten et al., 2025). When teaching approaches do not align with these diverse learning preferences, children's engagement, motivation, and overall learning outcomes may decline (Buchari, 2018). In the worst cases, such mismatches can result in disengagement or resistance toward learning activities.

This challenge becomes more complex in the context of Generation Alpha—children born from 2010 onwards—who are growing up in an environment saturated with digital technology (Aksoy & Cirik, 2025; Amanah et al., 2025; Azimirad, 2023). Generation Alpha tends to prefer instant, visually rich, and highly personalized learning experiences (Hutajulu et al., 2024). They often show remarkable ability in navigating digital platforms and mastering technological tools from an early age. While this digital fluency is a strength, it also comes with risks, such as reduced face-to-face communication skills, heightened dependency on gadgets, shortened attention spans, and decreased capacity for empathy, sharing, and collaboration (Aksoy & Cirik, 2025; Munawir et al., 2024).

The Covid-19 pandemic has further underscored the urgency of addressing these issues through strong character education (Andriani et al., 2018; Birhan et al., 2021; Fitri & Abdul Latif, 2021; Musyafa Ali et al., 2021). During the school-from-home period, many parents expressed concerns about the growing difficulty of guiding their children's learning. Instead of using technology primarily for educational purposes, many children shifted toward entertainment—watching YouTube, playing online games, or engaging with social media—often for extended periods (Akman et al., 2023; Budiarti & Yasmin Adar, 2023; Cimene et al., 2024). This behavioral shift suggests that while digital tools offer significant opportunities for learning, without appropriate guidance and strong moral grounding, technology can lead to habits that are counterproductive to children's holistic development. The integration of technology in early education must be balanced with deliberate efforts to instill values such as discipline, empathy, respect, and responsibility (Cao et al., 2024; McManus & Carvalho, 2022).

From a research perspective, a notable gap remains in the literature. Although numerous studies discuss character education broadly, few have examined how it can be effectively implemented for Generation Alpha at the kindergarten level, especially in localized educational settings such as TK Hang Tuah 13. Moreover, previous research often fails to consider the unique psychosocial and cognitive traits of children who have been immersed in a digital environment since birth, as well as the evolving challenges of post-pandemic learning environments.

In this context, the present study offers a fresh perspective by integrating three critical dimensions: (1) the diversity of children's learning styles, (2) the opportunities and challenges of the digital era, and (3) character-building strategies tailored to early learners in a specific local setting. By focusing on TK Hang Tuah 13 as a case study, this research seeks to develop practical

and culturally relevant recommendations for early childhood educators. The aim is to design learning experiences that not only engage children according to their preferred learning styles but also guide them in using technology as a constructive tool for exploration and creativity rather than as a source of passive consumption.

Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to the discourse on early childhood education by providing actionable insights for educators, parents, and policymakers. The findings are expected to help shape strategies that equip Generation Alpha with both digital literacy and strong moral character, enabling them to navigate future challenges with integrity, empathy, and adaptability. In doing so, this research aligns with the broader goal of fostering a generation capable of harnessing technological advancements while upholding ethical values in a rapidly changing world.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of learning strategies aimed at fostering early character development in Generation Alpha students at TK Hang Tuah 13. A case study approach was selected to allow for an in-depth, context-specific understanding of the phenomena under investigation, focusing on how educators, students, and parents interact in the process of character education. The research was conducted in a naturalistic setting to capture authentic behaviors, experiences, and perspectives without manipulation of the learning environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of teachers, students, and parents associated with TK Hang Tuah 13. The selection of participants was carried out using purposive sampling, ensuring that individuals included had direct involvement in or influence on the character development process of Generation Alpha students. Specifically, the study involved: Five classroom teachers, who were directly responsible for implementing learning activities; Twenty Generation Alpha students (aged 5–6 years) enrolled in the kindergarten. Eight parents who actively engaged with their children's learning at home. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, where additional participants were not added once no new themes emerged from the data.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a three-month period using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure triangulation and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In-depth interviews with teachers and parents were conducted to obtain detailed insights into their perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to early character education for Generation Alpha. Participant observations were undertaken in classroom settings to record teaching practices, student behaviors, and interactions during learning activities. Additionally, document analysis was performed by reviewing lesson plans, learning materials, and student work to identify how character development was integrated into the curriculum. Field notes and audio recordings were utilized to capture rich descriptive details, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the commencement of data collection.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved six stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes; (2) generating initial codes to categorize significant patterns; (3) searching for themes across codes; (4) reviewing and refining themes to ensure coherence and consistency; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing a narrative report supported by direct quotations from participants. To enhance the credibility and

trustworthiness of the findings, strategies such as member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation across data sources were applied.

RESULTS

Implementation of Character Education at TK Hang Tuah 13

Character education at TK Hang Tuah 13 is implemented in an integrated manner across all learning activities, both inside and outside the classroom. The school adopts the Buku 9 Pilar Karakter (Nine Pillars of Character Book) and the K4 concept—Cleanliness, Neatness, Health, and Safety—as its primary guidelines. The application of values is carried out through habituation, role modeling, structured activities, and providing opportunities for children to actively participate.

Each day begins with religious habituation practices such as praying together before and after lessons, greeting one another, and reciting short daily prayers. Honesty is reinforced through role-playing activities, such as buying and selling games, which train children to return change correctly. Discipline and responsibility are emphasized through rules on wearing the appropriate attire according to the schedule, arriving on time, and placing belongings in their designated places.

The school also integrates project-based learning and creative play to cultivate hard work, independence, and creativity. For example, children are involved in activities such as beading, cutting, gardening, cleaning the yard, and creating crafts from recycled materials. Democracy and communication skills are nurtured through question-and-answer sessions, group discussions, and opportunities to speak in front of the class.

Furthermore, outdoor activities such as flag ceremonies, cultural heritage introductions, educational visits, and food-sharing programs are used to instill a sense of nationalism, social awareness, and tolerance. Teachers play an active role as role models by demonstrating polite behavior, positive communication, and environmental awareness.

The results of the integrated character education implementation at TK Hang Tuah 13 are reflected in the children's daily behaviors and attitudes. Based on observations and interviews, several key character traits have developed in the children, which can be grouped into three main aspects: moral character, performance character, and social character.

Moral Character

In the moral aspect, children demonstrated improvement in honesty, responsibility, and respect. Honesty was evident when children returned change during role-play market activities or admitted to mistakes they had made. Responsibility was reflected in their compliance with dress schedules, completion of assigned tasks, and care for learning materials. Respect was shown through greetings, expressions of gratitude, and attentive listening when others were speaking.

In addition, the habituation of reciting prayers before and after lessons, as well as the introduction of short daily prayers, reinforced religious values that fostered gratitude and inner peace among the children. They became more sensitive to the norms prevailing both at school and at home.

Performance Character

Performance character encompassed discipline, diligence, independence, and creativity. Discipline was evident in the regularity with which children followed daily routines, such as lining up before entering the classroom and submitting assignments on time. Diligence appeared when children persisted in completing projects or games despite facing difficulties.

Independence developed through tasks that allowed children to manage themselves, such as organizing stationery, putting on shoes, or cleaning the table after meals. Creativity was displayed in children's works during beading, drawing, or crafting from recycled materials, often showing ideas beyond the teacher's initial instructions.

Social Character

Social character included care, cooperation, tolerance, and nationalism. Care was nurtured through activities such as food-sharing programs and social visits, where children learned to help those in need. Cooperation was cultivated through group games and joint projects that required sharing tasks and valuing peers' contributions.

Tolerance was demonstrated when children accepted cultural differences introduced during cultural appreciation activities, such as respecting various traditional dances and languages. Nationalism was reinforced through flag ceremonies and the learning of national songs, which fostered pride in being part of the Indonesian nation.

Impact on the School and Family Environment

The implementation of character education at TK Hang Tuah 13 had an impact not only on the children but also on the school and family environment. Teachers became more aware of the importance of consistency in their behavior, while parents reported positive changes in their children's behavior at home. Children who were previously reluctant to help with household chores began to habitually tidy up their toys or assist in setting the dining table.

Collaboration between the school and parents also improved through regular communication and joint activities, such as parent-teacher meetings and parenting classes. This created continuity of values between home and school, making character education more effective.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that character education at TK Hang Tuah 13 is implemented in an integrated manner across all learning activities, both inside and outside the classroom, by referring to the Nine Pillars of Character book and the K4 concept (Cleanliness, Orderliness, Health, and Safety). This strategy aligns with Lickona's view that effective character education requires integrating values into the entirety of school activities, rather than treating it as a separate subject (Lickona, 2009).

The approaches of habituation, role modeling, structured activities, and active student participation were found to effectively support character formation from an early age (Laili et al., 2022; Langsæther, 2019; Tiwuk et al., 2025). This result is consistent with Nucci and Narvaez, who stated that consistent habituation of positive behavior from early childhood can instill moral values with greater longevity (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). At TK Hang Tuah 13, practices such as communal prayers, role-play activities to instill honesty, and daily routines to cultivate discipline and responsibility exemplify concrete applications of character building.

In the domain of moral character, the development of honesty, respect, and responsibility among children demonstrates the success of this approach (Ayuni et al., 2025; Baker & Jambon, 2025; Shen et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025; Yucel et al., 2025; Yuliana & Busyro Karim, 2024; Zakharin & Bates, 2025). Berkowitz argue that moral knowing and moral action should be developed simultaneously through direct experiences, which in this context were realized through activities such as simulated buying and selling, exchanging greetings, and respecting others' opinions (Berkowitz, 2011). The habit of communal prayer also supports the reinforcement of religious character, as Halstead and Pike highlight the role of spiritual values in shaping a well-rounded personality (Halstead & Pike, 2006).

Regarding performance character, traits such as discipline, diligence, independence, and creativity have shown significant growth. Project-based and creative play activities, such as threading beads, gardening, and crafting from recycled materials, align with Piaget's constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of exploration and hands-on experiences in building skills (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2023). These findings are consistent with Obradović et al., who demonstrated that project-based learning in early childhood education enhances executive function and self-regulation (Obradović et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, children's social character—caring, cooperation, tolerance, and nationalism—was fostered through collaborative activities and cross-cultural social interactions. Activities such as sharing food packages, participating in flag ceremonies, and learning about regional cultures support Thornberg and Oğuz's finding that character education is most effective when it involves community engagement and authentic social interaction (Thornberg & Oğuz, 2016). Nationalism, reinforced through patriotic songs and cultural appreciation, plays a vital role in building children's social identity from an early age.

The positive impact observed in both the school and family environments underscores the importance of a strong school–family partnership. Epstein asserts that value continuity between home and school enhances the effectiveness of character education (Epstein, 2018). The study found that regular communication and collaborative activities with parents, such as parenting classes, created opportunities for reinforcing school-based values at home.

Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for the development of character education in early childhood, particularly in the Generation Alpha era. Integrating character values into all aspects of learning, including extracurricular activities, has proven effective in shaping children's moral, performance, and social traits. This approach can serve as a model for other early childhood institutions to avoid fragmented or ceremonial character education practices. Furthermore, active parental involvement in character-building processes strengthens the continuity of values between home and school, which positively impacts children's holistic development.

Research Contribution

This study offers both academic and practical contributions. From an academic perspective, it reinforces Lickona's (1991) theory emphasizing the importance of integrating character values into all aspects of school activities and supports Piaget's (1972) constructivist learning theory, which highlights the role of experience-based learning in children's development. Practically, the study presents a character education implementation model grounded in habituation, role modeling, and collaborative activities, which has been proven effective at TK Hang Tuah 13 and holds potential for adaptation in other early childhood education settings. From a policy standpoint, the findings advocate for the systematic integration of character education into early childhood curricula and underscore the need to strengthen partnerships between schools and parents to ensure consistency and reinforcement of character values both at school and at home.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, it was conducted in a single educational institution, TK Hang Tuah 13, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other schools with different cultural, social, and educational contexts. Second, the data collection was carried out over a relatively short period of three months, making it challenging to capture long-term changes in children's character development. Third, the qualitative design employed in this research offers rich, descriptive insights but does not quantitatively measure the effectiveness of each character education strategy implemented. Finally, external factors such as children's family backgrounds and broader social environments were not explored in depth, even though they may have significantly influenced the outcomes.

Suggestions

Based on the limitations identified, several recommendations are proposed for future research and practice. For future research, it is advisable to conduct longitudinal studies to measure the sustainability of children's character development over an extended period. Such studies could provide more comprehensive insights into the lasting effects of character education interventions. For educational practitioners, adopting an integrative approach that involves all stakeholders—including teachers, parents, and the local community—can strengthen the effectiveness of

character education. For policymakers, the development of flexible, context-specific, and adaptive national guidelines for early childhood character education is essential, ensuring alignment with the unique characteristics of Generation Alpha. Finally, for parents, it is recommended to implement character-building practices at home that are consistent with the school's values, thereby creating a coherent and reinforcing environment for children's moral development.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that character education implemented in an integrated manner across all learning activities—through habituation, role modeling, creative engagement, and parental involvement—can significantly develop moral, performance, and social dimensions in early childhood. The implementation model at TK Hang Tuah 13 demonstrates that character building does not require a separate subject but should be embedded into the school's culture. This success indicates that collaborative efforts among teachers, parents, and the surrounding environment are key to fostering positive character traits in Generation Alpha.

Future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies to assess the sustainability of character development from early childhood through subsequent educational stages, allowing for the evaluation of long-term impacts of the integrated model. Replicating the study in diverse contexts—such as rural and urban schools or institutions with varying socio-cultural backgrounds—would help test the generalizability of the findings. Employing quantitative or mixed-method approaches could provide statistical evidence on the effectiveness of specific strategies, including habituation, role modeling, creative engagement, and parental involvement, in fostering distinct dimensions of character. Additionally, exploring the role of technology and digital media in supporting or integrating character education for Generation Alpha is essential, given their identity as digital natives.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

ASA conceived the research idea and designed the study. RA and FS conducted the data collection. NPM and USJ developed the theoretical framework on learning for Generation Alpha, early character development, and related educational perspectives. FNA performed the data analysis. RNS, together with all authors, participated in discussions of the findings and contributed to the preparation and finalization of the manuscript.

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