

Characteristics of Students as Digital Natives: Opportunities and Challenges for the Guidance and Counselling Profession

Andre Julius¹, Muthahharah Thahir², Dwi Risma Sari³

^{1,2,3} Bimbingan dan Konseling, Universitas Ma'soem, Indonesia

¹andre.juliuz@gmail.com, ²muthahharah.thahir@gmail.com, ³dwirismasari.d@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the student's character is key to the success of counselling services. It is not uncommon for guidance and counselling teachers to receive requests from clients due to differences in perspectives between generations. Generation Z and Alpha are the clients targeted by guidance and counselling services today, so that in addition to understanding the problems, guidance and counselling teachers must also understand how to view these digital native generations. This study aims to conceptually examine the characteristics of Generation Z and Alpha as clients, while also identifying the opportunities and challenges facing the guidance and counselling profession. The study was conducted using a systematic literature review method specifically using SINTA and SCOPUS indexed articles as references. The results show that Generation Z and Alpha as clients have a high attachment to digital technology, good awareness of mental health issues, but are vulnerable in communication, problem-solving, and social relationships. These characteristics encourage the guidance and counselling profession to develop flexible, accessible, and technology-based services, but at the same time demand a transformation of paradigms, competencies, and counselling practices to remain client-centered. The main challenge lies in meaningful counselling relationships, as well as strengthening identity and belonging in clients.



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A. INTRODUCTION

Rapid technological advances, globalization, and socio-cultural changes have significantly shaped the developmental characteristics of contemporary youth. The term "contemporary" refers to Generations Z and Alpha, whose characteristics are largely shaped by technology, social media, and global challenges. Generations Z and Alpha, who grew up in a digital world, tend to be weak in problem-solving and view situations less holistically (Nurlaila et al., 2024), and are the primary recipients of guidance and counseling services in schools today. Differences in perspectives between generations are an issue that the guidance and counseling profession must address. Numerous studies have shown that students' low interest in counseling is due to their perceptions of guidance and counseling teachers (Maifitri & Daharnis, 2024), the need for services (Fatmilia & Daharnis, 2022; Khairunnisa et al., 2020), and the counseling process itself (El Rahma & Kholisna, 2021). This is also due to Generation Z often viewing traditional counseling as outdated or stigmatized (Wibowo, 2018).

Within the framework of school-based guidance and counseling, understanding the characteristics of this generation is closely related to the fundamental question: "Who is this counselee?". Based on the findings of narrative research conducted by Gibson & Cartwright (2013), counselees are individuals with priorities and desires; they will choose, evaluate, and feel responsible for the success of their therapy to align with their personal priorities. Another perspective states that counselees are individuals who receive assistance or attention related to the problems they face (Pane, 2020). Therefore, for guidance and counseling teachers, recognizing counselees means respecting their empowerment, providing space for choice and evaluation, while still providing support that can bridge the sense of helplessness they may feel in facing problems.

The contemporary counseling paradigm conceptualizes counselees as individuals developing through the broader educational, family, and social systems (Habsy, 2017). In this context, students' characteristics as digital natives cannot be understood in isolation. However, they must be viewed ecologically and contextually, including their digital communication patterns, personal values, learning preferences, and how they interpret support relationships.

Generation Z is known to need for speed (Juliyah Juliyah et al., 2025; Rachmaniar, 2021), personalization (Ruri Keristanti et al., 2025), and a tendency to seek solutions independently through online sources before seeking professional help (Rudianto, 2022). This presents an opportunity for the guidance and counseling profession to develop a more adaptive, participatory, and relevant service approach to counselees. However, it also poses serious challenges if the paradigms, competencies, and service models used are still oriented towards traditional patterns.

On the other hand, guidance and counseling teachers face professional demands to not only understand their clients' problems but also the generation's way of thinking. It is not uncommon for guidance and counseling teachers to experience resistance from students due to perceived incompatibilities between the child's generation and their counselor (Julius et al., 2020; Mustaqim, 2019). The generational mindset in question concerns the help-seeking behavior of Generation Z and Alpha in dealing with mental health issues and seeking professional assistance. Misalignment between client characteristics and service approaches can widen relational distance, reduce counseling engagement (Sugitri & Marjo, 2022), and strengthen client resistance to guidance and counseling services (Kinasih Khairiyah et al., 2024).

Many school counseling programs remain deeply tied to the traditional, face-to-face, counselor-centered paradigm, despite utilizing digital media. Digital transformation marks not only a shift from face-to-face to digital, but also an epistemic shift that rearticulates the purpose, modalities, and governance of school counseling services (Lakadjo et al., 2025). Consequently, a gap exists where students are increasingly alienated from school counseling resources, often opting for unregulated online alternatives or enduring mental health challenges in silence.

Furthermore, previous literature highlights students' reluctance to use counseling services, identifying contemporary characteristics such as a preference for digital communication (Bucci et al., 2019), a need for instant satisfaction (Katiyar et al., 2026),

and shifting mental health stigma (Maqsood et al., 2024) that impact the restructuring of counseling interactions. Guidance and counseling teachers often feel unprepared, lacking a concrete and generationally responsive framework.

Consequently, a key research issue lies in the gap between the evolving psychological and behavioral profiles of Generation Z and Alpha and stagnant models of school counseling service delivery. Without a thorough analysis of these contemporary characteristics and a clear mapping of the challenges they pose to conventional practices, the guidance and counseling profession risks losing systemic relevance

This article aims to examine the characteristics of Generation Z and Alpha clients conceptually and to identify the opportunities and challenges facing the guidance and counseling profession in the educational context. This study is expected to make theoretical contributions to enrich student's perspectives in contemporary counseling, as well as practical contributions as a reference for guidance and counseling teachers in designing services that are more contextually grounded, humanistic, and aligned with the psychological dynamics of today's students.

B. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a literature review design. The literature review was conducted using a systematic and tested procedure, namely the PRISMA model. The PRISMA flow used in this study can be seen in Figure 1 below.

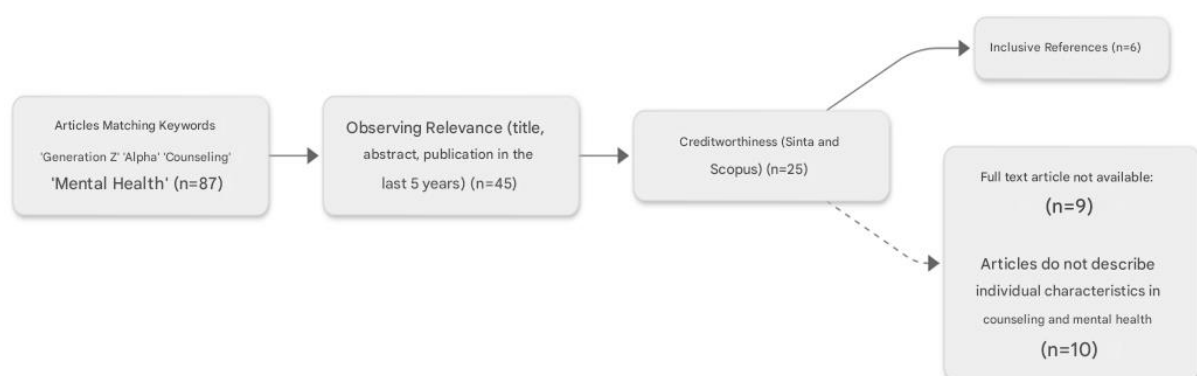


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow

Based on the literature selection flowchart, the inclusion criteria were carried out through four systematic stages, beginning with the identification of 87 articles using specific keywords related to Generation Z, Generation Alpha, Counseling, and Mental Health. In the screening stage, the articles were narrowed down to 45 documents with relevance criteria in the title and abstract and a maximum publication time limit of 5 years. The eligibility stage then eliminated articles based on the credibility of SINTA or SCOPUS indexed journals until 25 articles remained, while excluding 9 articles whose full text was not available and 10 articles that did not explain individual characteristics in the context of counseling and mental health. This process resulted in a final conclusion of 6 inclusive references that met all established standards of quality and research substance.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Result

The research results are compiled based on an analysis of literature that meets the established SLR criteria. Mapping the characteristics of the digital native generation is the result of a synthesis of empirical and conceptual studies relevant to the characteristics of the digital native generation as counselees, as well as their implications for the practice and profession of guidance and counselling. The research findings from selected references are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Result of SLR

No	Author, Year	Title	Indexing	Finding
1	(Navarro et al., 2020)	Exploring Mental Health Professionals' Perspectives of Text-Based Online Counseling Effectiveness With Young People: Mixed Methods Pilot Study	SCOPUS	a. Counselling services must be flexible and easily accessible. b. Today's students tend to utilize digital devices to reduce barriers to counselling engagement.
2	(Kumar & Rangaswamy, 2024)	Counseling Gen Alpha: Pandemic's Impact on Developmental and Mental Health	SCOPUS	Generation Alpha experienced a significant decline in the domains of communication, problem solving, and personal-social aspects compared to previous generations due to isolation during the pandemic.
3	(Naser et al., 2022)	Implementasi Langkah Kerja Konseling Model KIPAS Dalam Mengembangkan Karakter Generasi Alpha	SINTA	Generation Alpha is quite fast in learning things, provided that intensive guidance is needed.
4	(Malelak et al., 2024)	Penggunaan Teknologi Digital pada Generasi Z dan Alpha serta Implikasinya dalam Layanan Bimbingan dan Konseling	SINTA	a. Generation Z and Alpha are more aware of mental health issues than previous generations. b. Counsellors need to facilitate conversations about mental health using relevant, technology-based approaches, such as mental health apps or online discussion forums.
5	(Shaikh et al., 2024)	Examining Help-Seeking Intentions Among Generation Z College Students	SCOPUS	a. Counsellors need to focus on improving social connections as a service focus.

				b. Generation Z faces issues of belonging but is less likely to seek help for accompanying personal or emotional issues.
6	(Fadillah & Long, 2025)	Empowering Gen Z's Mental Health in a Hyperconnected World	SCOPUS	a. Generation Z is highly engaged with digital platforms, which can have both positive and negative impacts on their mental health. b. While digital engagement offers peer support and access to resources, it also poses risks such as social comparison and identity tension.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the characteristics of Generation Z and Alpha as counselees are inextricably linked to their strong attachment to digital technology and the accompanying psychosocial developmental vulnerabilities. Research by Navarro et al. (2020) shows that flexible, accessible counselling services, particularly via text-based media, can reduce barriers to adolescent engagement in counselling. This finding aligns with the context of Generation Z, which is accustomed to fast, asynchronous communication with minimal confrontation, requiring the guidance and counselling profession to reconstruct the form of support relationships to better align with the preferences of the digital generation.

On the developmental side, research by Kumar & Rangaswamy (2024) revealed a significant decline in communication, problem-solving, and personal-social skills among Generation Alpha due to social isolation during the pandemic. This situation strengthens the argument that today's youth require guidance and counselling services that are not only responsive to digital media but also focus on strengthening core developmental competencies. The findings of Naser et al. (2022) complement this perspective by demonstrating that Generation Alpha has a rapid learning capacity but still requires intensive mentoring. This emphasizes the role of strategic counsellors as developmental scaffolders, not simply information facilitators or technology users.

Furthermore, Malelak et al. (2024) demonstrated an increased awareness of mental health issues among Generation Z and Alpha compared to previous generations. This awareness opens significant opportunities for guidance and counselling services to serve as safe, relevant spaces for psychological dialogue, particularly through the use of mental health apps and open discussion forums. However, Shaikh et al.'s (2024) findings demonstrate a paradox in help-seeking among Generation Z: concerns about belonging and social connectedness increase, yet are not always accompanied by a corresponding increase in seeking professional help for underlying emotional issues. This situation suggests the need for counselling

approaches that emphasize building social connections and relational attachments as a gateway to services.

In the context of a hyperconnected world, Fadillah & Long (2025) emphasized that Generation Z's digital engagement is dual-faceted: serving as a source of psychosocial support and a risk factor through social comparison and identity tension. These findings reinforce the need for digital mental health literacy as an integral part of guidance and counselling services. Overall, the research findings indicate that the opportunities and challenges of the guidance and counselling profession lie in balancing the use of digital technology with strengthening counselling relationships, fostering developmental support, and sensitivity to the psychosocial dynamics of Generations Z and Alpha. Transforming the guidance and counselling paradigm and practices to focus on digital-generation clients is a crucial prerequisite for services to remain relevant, effective, and efficient.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Students are highly engaged with digital technology and have a strong awareness of mental health issues, yet are vulnerable in communication, problem-solving, and social relationships. These characteristics encourage the guidance and counselling profession to develop flexible, accessible, and technology-based services, while simultaneously demanding a transformation of counselling paradigms, competencies, and practices to ensure client-centeredness. The primary challenge lies in establishing meaningful counselling relationships and strengthening client identity and belonging. Therefore, the success of guidance and counselling services in the digital generation era depends heavily on the counsellor's ability to integrate technological approaches with developmental sensitivity and relational attachment in a balanced and contextual manner.

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