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Edutainment and Gen Z Student Engagement in Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze Generation Z students' perceptions of the implementation of edutainment as a learning strategy in Islamic higher education and its perceived contribution to student engagement and conceptual understanding. This study is important because Generation Z characteristics require interactive, participatory, and adaptive learning approaches. Using a quantitative survey with open-ended responses, data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to fourth-semester students at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. The findings indicate a highly positive perception of edutainment (mean = 4.59). Students perceived edutainment as reducing boredom, increasing learning interest, encouraging active participation, facilitating understanding, and creating a more comfortable learning environment. Nevertheless, respondents also highlighted challenges, including the possible dominance of entertainment elements over academic substance and the need for lecturers' pedagogical and digital competence. Within the context of Islamic higher education, edutainment may support the principles of taysir and meaningful learning while remaining oriented toward academic depth and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Edutainment, Generation Z, Higher education learning, Innovative learning strategies

INTRODUCTION

Today's students, especially at the Bachelor Strata I level, are dominated by Generation Z who were born between 1997-2012 (Kamil, 2023). Based on this size, the current age of Generation Z is between 29-14 years old, which is the age at the secondary, higher and higher education levels. Generation Z students who have grown up in a digital environment tend to be more responsive to interactive, contextual, and learner-centered learning approaches than to traditional lecture-based methods (Chardonnens, 2025). Therefore, strategies such as project-based learning, formative assessment, and active learning approaches are considered effective in enhancing student engagement, motivation, and learning autonomy.

Generation Z is characterized by a strong preference for visual content, a tendency to experience boredom more quickly, interactive communication patterns, and digital native traits that reflect high familiarity with technology and a preference for practicality (Fadillah et al., 2022). This of course affects the learning style and the level of concentration that they can provide when the learning activities and learning styles used must also consider the character of generation Z students so that they can be accepted and understood properly and easily. These characteristics significantly influence their learning styles and concentration levels during educational activities. Consequently, learning approaches and instructional strategies need to be designed by considering the distinctive characteristics of Generation Z students to ensure that learning materials are delivered, received, and understood more effectively and meaningfully.

Learning in higher education often uses approaches and methods that prioritize lectures and discussions without including fun elements so that students tend to be bored and have difficulty understanding and mastering the material given. Research conducted in Pasuruan in 2025 concluded that learning methods prioritize lecture and assignment methods so that they are less interesting and provide less space for creativity (Ningtyas & Pradikto, 2025). This research was carried out at the secondary education level while still providing an overview and new information related to the methods used and the level of attention from students and can be used as a benchmark for the university level considering the difference in the level of thinking development that is not too far.

Previous research conducted by Mukaffan (2013) offered a solution for learning Islamic Religious Education to be more effective with the Trend Edutainment method. Edutainment is seen as able to increase understanding because it involves positive emotions, creativity, and

direct participation of students through techniques such as humor, *role play*, multimedia, and educational games. This approach is also supported by modern learning theory that emphasizes the importance of a relaxed and stress-free learning atmosphere so that information can be received optimally. Edutainment not only creates a pleasant learning experience, but also contributes to the achievement of the goals of Islamic Religious Education more effectively and relevant to the needs of the times.

The emergence of the concept of *edutainment* as a learning approach is a response to the need for innovation in the world of education. This approach combines elements of education and entertainment in a systematic and measurable manner to create a more interesting, interactive, and meaningful learning process for students. In the context of modern learning, *edutainment* not only serves as a means of delivering material, but also as a strategy to increase motivation, engagement, and a pleasurable learning experience without compromising academic substance. Thus, the application of *edutainment* is expected to be able to bridge the gap between cognitive demands and the psychological needs of students, so that the learning process becomes more effective and oriented towards holistic potential development.

The use of Edutainment has increased and strengthened, especially during the Pandemic. The transition from face-to-face learning to online and hybrid learning has changed the pattern of interaction between lecturers and students, so that it demands a learning strategy that is more adaptive, creative, and able to maintain student involvement. *Edutainment* is present as an alternative approach that combines digital technology with elements of educational entertainment, such as the use of interactive media, learning videos, gamification, and other digital platforms. This approach in addition to increasing student motivation and participation also helps reduce the boredom that often arises in online learning. Thus, the application of *edutainment* in higher education is becoming increasingly relevant as an effort to create an effective, fun, and in accordance with the characteristics of the digital generation.

Studies on the Edutainment approach in Education show significant developments, especially at the primary and secondary education levels. Students at the Basic Education level with an age range of 7-13 years are in the concrete operational phase and Formal Operations (Marinda, 2020). This operational phase greatly affects the cognitive abilities of students. The concrete operational phase is characterized by the need for analogy or a real picture related to the material being delivered so as to avoid abstract and analytical learning (Marinda, 2020). The

Formal operational phase at the age of 11 years and above marks the ability of students to think abstractly and begin to be able to think analytically and respond to certain events or actions.

The characteristics of students in the Concrete Operational phase mainly require interactive, fun and contextual learning strategies to increase motivation and learning engagement (Cerovac & Keane, 2025). A number of empirical studies indicate that the integration of entertainment elements in learning is able to improve students' cognitive and affective learning outcomes at this level. However, the application and study of edutainment in higher education is still relatively limited, both in terms of conceptual exploration and practical implementation, which may be due to the assumption that students already have higher learning independence so that conventional approaches are still considered adequate. In fact, the dynamics of learning in higher education which are increasingly complex and require creativity actually open up space for the development of edutainment as an innovative strategy to improve the quality of learning. Therefore, there is a need for studies and research in answering contemporary pedagogical challenges and enriching the treasure of effective and relevant learning methods for students.

The lack of studies that specifically examine the perception of Generation Z students towards the practice of edutainment shows that there is a gap in contemporary education literature, especially in the midst of the unique characteristics of this generation which is known to be adaptive to digital technology, visual, and interactive learning approaches. Technically, Generation Z has different learning preferences compared to previous generations, so it demands more creative and participatory pedagogical education, including through the integration of edutainment. Existing research still focuses on the effectiveness of edutainment from the perspective of learning outcomes, not from the perspective of students' experiences and perceptions as the main subject of learning. The lack of in-depth empirical data on how Generation Z students interpret, accept, and even criticize edutainment practices has the potential to hinder the development of learning strategies that are truly responsive to their needs. Therefore, research that specifically explores the perception of Generation Z students is important to be carried out as a more comprehensive conceptual and empirical foundation in designing edutainment-based learning in higher education.

Student voices are very important because they function as learning subjects so that they become one of the variables in formulating adaptive and student-centered learning pedagogical strategies. Conceptually, the active involvement of students in providing their feedback, perspectives, and learning experiences allows lecturers to design learning approaches that are

more relevant, contextual, and responsive to real-world needs in the classroom. However, students are still marginally positioned and have not been systematically integrated in the formulation of learning strategies in higher education. This condition has implications for the lack of optimal pedagogical innovation that should be able to answer the dynamics of student characteristics, especially in the digital era. Therefore, strengthening the role of students as active partners in the learning process is an urgency that cannot be ignored in order to produce an adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable pedagogical strategy.

Based on this description, there is a need for research on the application of Edutainment in Higher Education, especially when viewed from the perspective of students. Therefore, this study aims to identify the opinions of Generation Z students towards Edutainment-based learning strategies and analyze the dimensions of edutainment that have the most influence on student engagement and understanding. This goal can also be used as an overview of the effectiveness of edutainment in learning in lectures.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive quantitative survey design complemented by open-ended responses to explore Generation Z students' perceptions of edutainment-based learning in higher education. The participants consisted of 152 fourth-semester students at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya who met the Generation Z criteria (born between 1997–2012) and were selected through purposive sampling based on their learning experiences in higher education. Data were collected through an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) measuring learning enjoyment, student engagement, relevance of edutainment, conceptual understanding, and learning comfort, complemented by several open-ended questions. Instrument validity was evaluated through expert judgement involving two educational experts, while reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.87, indicating strong internal consistency. Quantitative data were processed descriptively using Microsoft Excel to calculate mean scores and percentages, whereas open-ended responses were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and meanings. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and research ethics compliance.

Survey participants are 4th semester students who are classified as Generation Z for Education study programs in UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya with the 152 respondents. This selection is based on the fact that active students in the 4th semester have received enough

courses to provide assessments and interpretations of the learning styles and methods used by lecturers in lectures. Education students also have a more sensitive sensitivity to the types of methods, learning models and teaching techniques so that survey results can be obtained that are more in line with the research objectives.

Data were collected using a Google Forms-based questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The questionnaire measured several key indicators, including entertainment elements, active engagement, material clarity, learning motivation, and meaningful learning experiences. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to determine mean scores and response distributions. In addition, qualitative responses from the open-ended questions were analyzed through thematic interpretation to provide deeper insights and enrich the quantitative findings.

The data analysis process was conducted by calculating the proportion of students' responses to each questionnaire item and presenting the results in percentages grouped according to the established indicators. This approach aimed to identify the level of students' perceptions toward each statement and indicator measured in the study. The processed quantitative data were subsequently interpreted using relevant theories of education, edutainment, and Islamic education to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the findings and to generate theoretically grounded and academically accountable conclusions.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Aspects of Students' Enjoyment and Interest in Edutainment

The survey results indicate that Gen Z students perceived edutainment positively in enhancing learning enjoyment and reducing boredom, with mean scores of 4.62 and 4.58 respectively. These high scores suggest that the integration of entertainment elements contributes to creating a more engaging and stimulating learning environment. For Generation Z students, who are closely associated with interactive and technology-mediated learning experiences, edutainment appears to accommodate their learning preferences by transforming conventional classroom activities into more enjoyable and meaningful experiences. This finding aligns with the primary objective of edutainment, which seeks to combine educational content with enjoyable learning experiences without diminishing academic substance. Increased enjoyment and interest in learning may also strengthen student engagement and participation, thereby fostering a more student-centered learning atmosphere (Dey & Munshi, 2025)

Therefore, the findings suggest that edutainment functions not merely as an entertaining instructional strategy but as a pedagogical approach capable of enhancing students' emotional involvement and learning motivation. Gen Z students who are digital natives are used to seeing and digesting information in the form of audio-visual, interactive and technology-based. This reinforces the relevance of the use of edutainment in learning. The habit of digesting information in audiovisual form also makes traditional learning methods feel monotonous and less desirable and reduces students' focus levels. Edutainment then becomes one of the strategic choices in adaptive pedagogy by accommodating varied learning styles and at the same time creating relevant learning nuances for students. However, the use of the edutainment method cannot replace conventional methods, but is combined synergistically to create a varied and meaningful learning experience (Sokolova & Deviatnikova, 2023). The creativity of lecturers in this case is the key to developing interesting and substantive learning activities.

The high level of student enjoyment and interest in edutainment-based learning indicates that this approach extends beyond methodological variation and functions as a strategy to enhance interaction and engagement in the learning process. For Generation Z students, whose learning preferences are closely associated with interactivity and dynamic learning environments, edutainment provides opportunities to communicate academic content in a more accessible and meaningful manner without compromising instructional substance. However, the effectiveness of edutainment depends on careful instructional design and clear learning objectives. Entertainment elements should therefore be integrated systematically and remain learning-oriented to ensure that enjoyment supports, rather than distracts from, academic achievement and conceptual understanding.

The Relevance of Edutainment to Generation Z Students

Generation Z is known as digital native, so an entertainment and technology-based approach is indeed appropriate. This study shows the relevance of Edutainment to Gen Z characteristics at a high number of 4.48. This figure shows that the majority of respondents who are Gen Z students feel that edutainment provides a learning experience according to their preferences. The learning presented is able to form a pattern of knowledge and learning choices that are visual, interactive, fast and experience-based.

These findings are in line with Marc Prensky's view that the digital generation has a different way of thinking and learning than previous generations, especially in terms of speed of

access to information and preference for interactive media (Trikalis et al., 2023; Prensky, 2011). In this context, edutainment is present as an adaptive approach because it integrates elements of technology, visualization, and entertainment that are in accordance with the daily world of Generation Z. Thus, learning not only becomes more contextual, but also able to bridge the gap between lecturers' teaching styles and students' learning styles.

Furthermore, the relevance of edutainment to Generation Z can also be understood through the perspective of constructivist learning theory, where students play an active role in building knowledge through meaningful learning experiences. Edutainment, which is often packaged in the form of interactive videos, gamification, or digital simulations, provides a space for students to be directly involved in the learning process. This strengthens cognitive and emotional engagement, which ultimately impacts improved material understanding and retention.

The implementation of edutainment requires strict control and careful planning so that the opportunity for the dominance of the fun aspect and the reduction of the depth of analysis and critical thinking of students can be avoided (Prensky, 2011). The role of lecturers in this case is very crucial because lecturers are required to have the ability to design learning strategies that are not only visually appealing, but still oriented towards learning outcomes and strengthening students' competencies to always think critically and creatively. Thus, edutainment can be used as a relevant and strategic approach in learning for Gen Z students as long as it is applied proportionally and based on clear planning and academic goals.

Gen Z Student Engagement and Interactivity in Edutainment-based Learning

The findings indicate that students perceived edutainment-based learning as supportive of engagement and interactivity, reflected in a relatively high mean score of 4.34 for active participation. This suggests that edutainment creates learning environments that encourage students to participate more actively rather than remain passive recipients of information. Such findings align with the principles of student-centered learning, which emphasize learners' active involvement, collaboration, and autonomy in the learning process. For Generation Z students, who generally prefer interactive and participatory learning experiences, edutainment appears to provide a pedagogical approach that not only facilitates conceptual understanding but also

promotes adaptability, creativity, and problem-solving skills within meaningful learning contexts.

The results of this study are in line with the principles of active learning developed by Bonwell and Aison which emphasize the importance of active participation of students through discussion, exploration and direct interaction with the material, which in this case is carried out with the edutainment learning strategy (Salinas-Navarro & Vilalta-Perdomo, 2025). Edutainment uses various interactive media such as the use of videos, quizzes, gamification, songs, or other stimulants that encourage students to participate more intensely. This not only strengthens students' concentration and interest but also strengthens students' contextual and conceptual understanding in the process of critical thinking, discussing, and reflecting on the material presented.

The increase in discussion activities in learning shows that there is a more intense social interaction in students. This shows that there is an exchange of ideas, arguments, and clarification of a more open understanding. In the perspective of Social Constructivism, this kind of interaction is very important because epistemically, knowledge is built through a collaborative process (Hafizi, 2023). Edutainment learning strategies are able to be a trigger that creates a more fluid, communicative learning atmosphere and students become more comfortable to express opinions and express their understanding obtained in learning.

Nevertheless, this increased engagement and interactivity needs to be balanced with effective classroom management. Without clear direction, overly free discussions have the potential to be out of the expected academic context. Therefore, lecturers still have a strategic role as facilitators who direct the course of interaction to stay focused on learning objectives. Thus, the results of this study confirm that edutainment not only increases the enjoyment aspect, but also significantly strengthens *active learning* practices through increased engagement and quality of interaction in learning.

Meaningful Learning and Conceptual Understanding in Education and Entertainment-Based Learning

The results of research on the aspect of understanding and the meaning of learning show that edutainment not only functions as a fun strategy, but also has a real contribution to the cognitive dimension of students. This is reflected in the mean value of 4.41 in the "more meaningful material" indicator and around 4.33 in the "easier to understand" indicator. Both of

these values indicate that students not only enjoy the learning process, but also experience improvements in conceptual understanding and the ability to relate material to a broader context. In other words, edutainment is able to encourage the formation of *meaningful learning*, which is a learning process that is not just memorization, but involves a deep meaning of the information received.

Theoretically, these findings are in line with the theory *meaningful learning* put forward by David Ausubel, who emphasized that learning will be more effective when new information is linked to a pre-existing cognitive structure (Bryce & Blown, 2024). In this context, edutainment through visual media, narrative, simulation, and an experiential-based approach helps students relate abstract concepts to concrete situations. This simplifies the process of cognitive elaboration, so that the material is not only understood on the surface learning, but also in depth.

Furthermore, the ease of understanding felt by students can also be explained through theory *cognitive theory of multimedia learning* developed by Richard E. Mayer (Petersen et al., 2023). This theory states that a precisely designed combination of text, images, audio, and animation can increase the information processing capacity in working memory. Edutainment that utilizes various modalities allows students to receive information through various sensory pathways, thereby strengthening retention and understanding. Thus, the use of interactive media in edutainment is not just a variation of methods, but has a strong cognitive basis in increasing the effectiveness of learning.

However, it should be noted that improving understanding through edutainment is highly dependent on the quality of learning design. If the entertainment element is more dominant than the academic substance, then there is a risk of *cognitive overload* or even distractions that actually hinder understanding (Sari et al., 2024). Therefore, lecturers need to ensure that each element of edutainment has a clear pedagogical function and is integrated with the learning objectives. Thus, the results of this study confirm that edutainment not only improves affective aspects, but also contributes significantly to the understanding and meaning of student learning cognitively.

Gen Z Students' Learning Comfort to Edutainment-Based Learning

A relaxed atmosphere has a significant contribution to the effectiveness of the learning process. This is reflected in the mean value of 4.41 on the indicator "relaxed atmosphere increases comfort", which indicates that the majority of students feel a more conducive psychological condition when learning takes place without excessive pressure. In the pedagogical context,

learning comfort is not only a supporting factor, but is an important prerequisite for the internalization of knowledge. A learning environment that is too tense tends to hinder participation, reduce concentration, and limit students' courage in expressing opinions.

Theoretically, this finding can be explained through the concept *affective filter hypothesis* presented by Stephen Krashen. Krashen explained that affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence greatly influence the success of the learning process (Luo, 2024). In a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, so that *affective filter* students become lower, so they are more open in receiving and processing information (Jawed et al., 2025). On the contrary, a rigid and stressful atmosphere can increase anxiety which ultimately inhibits cognitive processes. Thus, edutainment that presents a relaxed feel plays a role in creating an optimal emotional state for learning.

In addition, from the perspective of humanistic education pioneered by Carl Rogers, a positive, empathetic, and non-threatening learning environment is key in facilitating the development of students' potential to the maximum (Krikorian, 2022). Rogers emphasizes the importance of *student-centered learning*, where students feel valued, safe, and comfortable in the learning process. The relaxed atmosphere produced through the edutainment approach allows the creation of a more egalitarian relationship between lecturers and students, so that learning interactions become more open and dialogical. This condition not only increases comfort, but also strengthens students' emotional involvement with the material studied.

Learning comfort is also closely related to improving the quality of material internalization. When students are in a relaxed psychological state, their cognitive capacity can work more optimally in processing, storing, and integrating new information into existing knowledge structures. This is in line with the findings of research in the field of educational psychology which shows that positive emotions can improve attention, memory, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, the relaxed atmosphere presented through edutainment not only has an impact on the affective aspect, but also has direct implications for the success of cognitive learning.

The findings indicating positive student perceptions toward edutainment-based learning can also be interpreted through the lens of Islamic educational theory, particularly the concepts of *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*. These three concepts constitute an integrated grand design of Islamic education aimed at developing learners holistically through intellectual, personal, and moral formation. *Tarbiyah* emphasizes nurturing and developing students' potential and personality,

ta'lim focuses on the systematic transmission and understanding of knowledge, while ta'dib concerns the cultivation of ethical awareness and proper conduct (Ridwan, 2025). Within this framework, edutainment is not merely understood as an entertaining instructional strategy; rather, it can function as a pedagogical approach that encourages active engagement, facilitates meaningful knowledge acquisition, and supports value-oriented learning experiences. Therefore, the positive engagement demonstrated by Generation Z students in this study reflects not only effective instructional practice but also aligns with the holistic orientation of Islamic education that integrates cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions.

Thus, the results of this study confirm that the creation of a comfortable and non-tense learning environment is an important element in learning strategies, especially in the context of Generation Z. However, a relaxed atmosphere still needs to be managed proportionally so as not to reduce academic discipline. Lecturers need to ensure that the comfort built is still oriented towards achieving learning goals, so that the balance between a pleasant atmosphere and the depth of the material is maintained.

Perceived Contribution of Edutainment to the Learning Quality of Gen Z Students

The survey results show that the implementation of edutainment in higher education has a significant impact on the quality of student learning experience, especially in the aspects of fun learning, interactivity, and emotional engagement. These findings reinforce the assumption that learning in the digital age is no longer enough to rely on a cognitive approach alone, but rather needs to integrate affective and participatory dimensions.

In the Joyful learning indicator, a very high score indicates that students no longer view learning as a monotonous and burdensome activity. This is in line with John Dewey's view that meaningful learning experiences must involve elements of fun and relevance to the lives of learners (Novakowski, 2024). In the context of higher education, edutainment is able to break the rigidity of conventional learning that tends to be lecture-oriented (teacher-centered), thereby creating a more humanistic and contextual learning atmosphere. Dede Rosyada's research also confirms that fun learning contributes to increasing students' intrinsic motivation, which ultimately has an impact on academic achievement (Nasution & Rosyada, 2022).

Joyful learning in Islamic education should not be understood merely as entertainment-oriented instruction but as a pedagogical approach that fosters students' intellectual, emotional, and spiritual engagement. This perspective aligns with the educational thought of Syed

Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, who conceptualized education as *ta'dib*, the cultivation of proper knowledge, ethics, and moral consciousness (Islam, 2024). From this standpoint, edutainment-based learning is pedagogically meaningful when it promotes not only enjoyment and engagement but also character formation and holistic educational development in Islamic higher education.

Furthermore, in the aspect of interactivity, a high score indicates that the use of media such as educational games, digital quizzes, and interactive platforms is able to increase student active participation. These findings are in line with Lev Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism which emphasizes the importance of interaction in the process of knowledge formation. Interactivity in edutainment not only strengthens the understanding of concepts, but also encourages collaboration and communication between students (Wardani et al., 2023). A study conducted by Richard E. Mayer shows that interactive multimedia-based learning can significantly improve knowledge retention and transfer compared to conventional methods (Petersen et al., 2023).

As for the indicator of emotional involvement, a high score indicates that students feel more psychologically connected to the learning material. Emotional involvement is an important factor in the process of internalizing knowledge, as described in affective theory by Daniel Goleman who emphasizes that emotions play a role in strengthening the learning and decision-making process (Varvatsoulas, 2023). In this context, edutainment not only functions as a pedagogical strategy, but also as a psychopedagogical approach that is able to build closeness between students and materials, lecturers, and the learning environment.

Overall, these three indicators show that edutainment has great potential in transforming learning in higher education to be more adaptive to the characteristics of the digital generation (Gen Z). However, the implementation of Edutainment needs to be criticized so that it is not trapped in the entertainment-oriented aspect, but remains oriented towards achieving learning outcomes. From the perspective of Islamic education, this approach is also relevant to the principles of *taysir* (ease) and *tabsyir* (giving good news) in da'wah and education, while maintaining ethical values and scientific substance. Thus, edutainment can be positioned as an innovative learning strategy that not only increases student engagement, but also strengthens the integration between cognitive, affective, and social aspects in the higher education process.

Edutainment is perceived as a learning approach that is able to transform the learning experience into a more dynamic, participatory, and meaningful one. The main advantage that most consistently emerges is its ability in Reduce boredom and able to Bring a fun learning

atmosphere. These findings indicate that edutainment functions as an effective pedagogical strategy and is responsive to student saturation of conventional learning models. From the perspective of the theory of learning experience, this is in line with John Dewey's thought who emphasized the importance of pleasant experiences as a prerequisite for the formation of meaningful learning (Novakowski, 2024). In addition, the increase in students shows that pedagogically integrated entertainment elements are able to activate intrinsic motivation, as affirmed by Edward Deci in theory *self-determination*, that autonomy and fun play a role in increasing learning engagement (Nguyen et al., 2022).

Students also assess that from the cognitive side of edutainment simplify the understanding of the material, especially when packaged in visual and interactive form. These findings reinforce Richard E. Mayer's thinking on *multimedia learning*, where the combination of text, images, and interactivity can improve the process of processing information in working memory (Mayer, 2024). Thus, edutainment not only has an impact on the affective aspect, but also contributes to improving the quality of students' conceptual understanding.

However, Edutainment also has the opportunity to cause a number of Crucial Challenges. One of the main issues is the risk of a shift in students' focus from the substance of the material to the entertainment aspect. This criticism is important because it shows that edutainment has the potential to be biased if it is not designed proportionately. In this context, the edutainment approach needs to be controlled in order to remain within the framework *learning-centered*, not just *entertainment-centered*. In addition, the implementation of edutainment requires high creativity and readiness of lecturers, both in learning design and mastery of technology. This is in line with the demands of pedagogic competence which places lecturers not only as material presenters, but also as *learning designer* (Heggart & Dickson-Deane, 2022). Another challenge is the need for Time and technology infrastructure which in some institutional contexts is still a structural constraint.

Related to the most effective form of edutainment, Data shows that Interactive games and quizzes to be the dominant choice of students. This shows that the elements of competition, direct feedback, and active participation have a high appeal in increasing student learning engagement. This finding can be explained through Lev Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, which emphasizes that learning will occur optimally through interaction and collaborative activities (Vygotsky, 2024). In addition, Videos and simulations is considered

effective because it is able to present a concrete visual representation, while Activity-Based Discussions strengthen the reflective and critical dimension in learning.

Overall, the results of this qualitative analysis confirm that edutainment has strong relevance in the context of higher education, especially in answering the characteristics of the digital generation that require interactive, visual, and meaningful learning. However, its implementation needs to be based on a mature instructional design so that a balance between the entertainment aspect and academic goals is maintained. From the perspective of Islamic education, this approach can be understood as part of the *taysir* (facilitation) strategy in learning, as long as it remains oriented to the substance of science and academic ethical values.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that edutainment is a relevant learning strategy for Generation Z students in Islamic higher education because it enhances engagement, learning comfort, and conceptual understanding through interactive learning experiences. Educational games, quizzes, videos, and digital simulations support student-centered learning by encouraging active participation and emotional involvement. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on students' perceptions and its contextualization of edutainment within the socio-digital characteristics of Generation Z in Islamic higher education.

However, edutainment must be implemented proportionately so that learning remains academically meaningful and does not become merely entertainment-oriented. Lecturers play a key role as facilitators and learning designers, requiring pedagogical competence, creativity, digital literacy, and adequate institutional support. Theoretically, this study strengthens discussions on student engagement and constructivist learning, while practically, it offers guidance for developing innovative learning strategies suited to Generation Z learners.

This study is limited by its single-institution context and descriptive survey design, which restrict broader generalization. Future research should use comparative, longitudinal, or mixed-method approaches, involve wider institutional settings, and examine measurable learning outcomes as well as lecturers' perspectives. Overall, this study contributes contextual evidence that edutainment can support more adaptive, student-centered, and meaningful learning in Islamic higher education.

Declaration of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for language refinement, grammar checking, and academic writing assistance. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy, and originality of the publication's final version.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Authorship contributions are reported following the CRedit (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) system.

- a. **Fina Wardani**: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing Original Draft, and Writing – Review & Editing.
- b. **Siti Khodijah Nurul Aula**: Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Project Administration, and Writing – Review & Editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data supporting the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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Ethical Approval Statement

The authors confirm that this study adheres to ethical research standards. Participation in this study was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and all responses

were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and data protection. No patient-identifying information was used in this research.

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