



## Beyond the Classroom: Leveraging International Community Service to Fortify Islamic Identity in Japanese Muslim Children

Nur Khasanah<sup>1\*</sup>, M. Ali Ghuftron<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan

✉ [m.ali.ghuftron@uingusdur.ac.id](mailto:m.ali.ghuftron@uingusdur.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

*This community service focused on strengthening the Islamic character education of Muslim children within Japanese families through a series of highly interactive activities. The program was structured around practical engagement, including seminars, communal prayers, and targeted Quran recitation sessions. These components were specifically designed to deepen the children's grasp of core Islamic values and actively cultivate their religious practices. The results following the program were noteworthy. Data indicated a significant boost in the participants' understanding of Islamic character, marked by a 30% increase in comprehension. Furthermore, there was a 25% rise in their active engagement with religious practices. Beyond the statistical improvements, a crucial, lasting outcome was the successful establishment of a supportive community network. This network now provides a vital lifeline for Muslim families in Japan, helping them navigate their daily lives while securely maintaining their cultural and religious identity. This program's success underscores its critical importance for ensuring the continued development of Islamic character among the younger generation in Japan, directly addressing the unique cultural and societal challenges they face. The findings strongly affirm that interactive and hands-on methods are essential for effective character education, pointing to a clear need for sustained support and the expansion of similar programs to benefit more Muslim families across the country.*

*Pengabdian masyarakat ini berfokus pada penguatan pendidikan karakter Islami bagi anak-anak Muslim dalam keluarga-keluarga Jepang melalui serangkaian kegiatan yang interaktif. Program ini disusun berdasarkan keterlibatan praktis, meliputi seminar, salat berjemaah, dan sesi pembacaan Al-Qur'an terarah. Komponen-komponen ini dirancang secara spesifik untuk memperdalam pemahaman anak-anak tentang nilai-nilai inti Islam dan secara aktif membina praktik keagamaan mereka. Hasil setelah program ini menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan dalam pemahaman peserta mengenai karakter Islami, ditandai dengan peningkatan 30% dalam pemahaman. Selain itu, terdapat kenaikan 25% dalam keterlibatan aktif mereka terhadap praktik keagamaan. Di luar peningkatan statistik, hasil penting yang berkelanjutan adalah keberhasilan pembentukan jaringan komunitas yang suportif. Jaringan ini kini menyediakan jalur dukungan yang vital bagi keluarga Muslim di Jepang, membantu mereka menjalani kehidupan sehari-hari sambil mempertahankan identitas budaya dan agama mereka dengan aman.*



*Keberhasilan program ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya yang krusial untuk memastikan kesinambungan pengembangan karakter Islami di kalangan generasi muda di Jepang, secara langsung mengatasi tantangan budaya dan sosial unik yang mereka hadapi. Temuan ini secara kuat menegaskan bahwa metode interaktif dan langsung sangat penting untuk pendidikan karakter yang efektif, menunjukkan adanya kebutuhan jelas untuk dukungan berkelanjutan dan perluasan program serupa demi memberi manfaat bagi lebih banyak keluarga Muslim di seluruh negeri.*

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## **A. INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, the global Muslim community has faced numerous challenges in maintaining cultural and religious identity, particularly in non-Muslim majority countries. One such context is Japan, where the Muslim population, although small, is growing due to increasing immigration and international exchange (Takeshita, 2008). This demographic shift presents unique challenges for Muslim families, especially in the realm of education and the transmission of Islamic values to their children (Rahmi et al., 2021; Sakurai, 2008; Suparno, 2013). The need for effective educational programs that cater to the specific needs of Muslim children in Japan has become increasingly urgent. This article discusses a community service program aimed at strengthening Islamic character education for Muslim children in Japanese families, highlighting its significance, methodology, and outcomes.

Islamic character education is essential for instilling moral values, ethical behavior, and a sense of identity among Muslim youth. According to Ilmi et al., (2023) and Wasilah et al., (2023), character education in Islam encompasses the development of virtues such as honesty, compassion, and respect for others, which are integral to the Islamic faith. The teachings of the Quran and the Hadith provide a framework for nurturing these values, emphasizing the importance of character in personal and communal life (Ilmi et al., 2023; Khasanah, 2024; Wasilah et al., 2023). In a multicultural society like Japan, where Muslim children may encounter cultural differences and potential identity crises, a robust Islamic character education program can serve as a vital resource for reinforcing their faith and values.

Muslim families in Japan often face significant challenges in preserving their religious and cultural identity. The lack of Islamic educational institutions and community support can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection from their faith (Hussain, 2019). Furthermore, the Japanese educational system, which is predominantly secular, may not adequately address the spiritual and cultural needs of Muslim children. As a result, many families struggle to provide their children with a comprehensive understanding of their faith, leading to a potential dilution of Islamic values (Khan, 2021).

The challenges are compounded by societal perceptions and stereotypes about Islam, which can create an environment of misunderstanding and prejudice. Research indicates that Muslim children in non-Muslim majority countries often experience identity conflicts, which can affect their self-esteem and sense of belonging (Abdul Rahman, 2020). Therefore, it is



crucial to develop programs that not only educate children about their faith but also foster a sense of community and belonging.

The community service program discussed in this article was designed to address these challenges by providing a structured environment for Muslim children to learn about Islamic character education. The primary objectives of the program were (1) to deepen children's understanding of key Islamic principles and values, such as compassion, honesty, and respect for others, (2) to encourage regular religious practices among participants, (3) to create a supportive network for Muslim families in Japan, fostering connections among families and providing resources for navigating cultural challenges, and (4) to promote cultural integration by encouraging dialogue and understanding between Muslim families and the broader Japanese community.

The significance of this community service program extends beyond the immediate educational outcomes for the children involved. By addressing the unique challenges faced by Muslim families in Japan—such as limited access to halal food in school cafeterias, scheduling conflicts with daily prayers, and the absence of Islamic religious education in the national curriculum—this initiative fills critical gaps that the formal education system has been slow or unable to resolve due to its rigid, standardized structure and secular orientation. Unlike formal schooling, which is bound by national curriculum guidelines and often prioritizes uniformity over cultural specificity, community service as a non-formal educational intervention offers greater flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and direct involvement of the Muslim community itself. This approach enables tailored, experiential learning that respects religious practices while fostering intercultural competence among both Muslim and non-Muslim participants. As Banks (2016) argues, multicultural education is most effective when it actively promotes understanding, reduces prejudice, and equips students with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in a culturally diverse society—outcomes that non-formal, community-driven programs can achieve more rapidly and authentically than institutionally constrained formal education. Thus, this community service model not only complements but often surpasses formal education in addressing the lived realities of minority religious communities in Japan, providing a scalable and replicable framework for inclusive multicultural education.

Furthermore, the program serves as a model for similar initiatives in other non-Muslim majority countries, demonstrating the potential for community-driven solutions to address the educational needs of minority populations. By fostering a supportive community network and promoting cultural integration, the program not only benefits Muslim children but also enriches the broader community by promoting diversity and understanding.

## **B. METHODS**

This community service program adopted a participatory and context-sensitive approach, integrating experiential learning principles with culturally responsive pedagogy to strengthen Islamic character education among Muslim children in Japanese families. The methodology was structured into four key phases: preparation, implementation, engagement, and evaluation.

### **1. Preparation Phase**

Prior to implementation, a comprehensive needs assessment was conducted through informal interviews and focus group discussions with Muslim families residing in Tokyo, Saitama, and surrounding areas. This phase aimed to identify: (1) The specific challenges faced by Muslim parents in transmitting Islamic values; (2) The availability of religious



education resources and community support; (3) The preferred modes of learning and engagement for children aged 6–15.

The findings informed the design of the program curriculum, which emphasized core Islamic virtues—such as honesty (*ṣidq*), compassion (*raḥmah*), respect (*iḥtirām*), and responsibility (*amānah*)—as outlined in Ilmi et al. (2023) and Wasilah et al. (2023).

## 2. Implementation Phase

The program was conducted over a 12-week period, with weekly sessions held at Tokyo Camii and online via Zoom to accommodate families in distant prefectures. Each session was divided into three components: (1) Interactive Seminars: Delivered by educators affiliated with PCINU Jepang, these sessions combined storytelling, multimedia presentations, and group discussions. Topics included Islamic ethics, daily worship practices, and cultural adaptation strategies. (2) Practical Activities: Children participated in role-playing exercises, journaling, and collaborative tasks designed to apply Islamic values in real-life scenarios. For example, a “Kindness Challenge” encouraged children to perform acts of compassion and reflect on their experiences. (3) Congregational Worship and Quranic Recitation: Families engaged in guided prayers and Quran sessions, emphasizing tajwid and memorization. These activities reinforced communal identity and spiritual discipline.

## 3. Engagement and Community Building

To foster long-term impact, the program facilitated the formation of parent support groups and child peer circles. WhatsApp and Telegram channels were used to share resources, reminders, and motivational content. Monthly family gatherings were organized to strengthen social bonds and encourage intercultural dialogue with local Japanese communities.

This approach aligns with Kolb's (2014) experiential learning cycle, where concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation are integrated into the learning process.

## 4. Evaluation and Impact Assessment

Program effectiveness was measured using a mixed-methods approach: (1) Pre- and Post-Program Surveys: Administered to both children and parents to assess changes in understanding, attitudes, and practices related to Islamic character education. (2) Observation and Participation Logs: Facilitators recorded attendance, engagement levels, and behavioral indicators during sessions. (3) Qualitative Feedback: Collected through interviews and open-ended questionnaires, capturing participants' reflections on the program's relevance and impact.

Quantitative data showed a 30% increase in children's comprehension of Islamic values and a 25% rise in religious practice engagement. Qualitative responses highlighted improved family cohesion, increased confidence in religious parenting, and a stronger sense of community belonging.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of this community service yielded measurable success across four critical domains: enhanced religious literacy, improved parenting confidence, greater community cohesion, and strengthened intercultural dialogue.



### 1. Quantitative Enhancement of Religious Literacy and Practice

The most compelling outcome was the significant improvement in the children's direct engagement with the curriculum.

Table 1. Quantitative Improvement in Children's Religious Literacy and Practice After Program Implementation

Metric	Pre-Program Score (Mean $\pm$ SD)	Post-Program Score (Mean $\pm$ SD)	Mean Difference	p-value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Comprehension of Islamic Character Values	58.4 $\pm$ 14.2 %	88.7 $\pm$ 9.8 %	+30.3 %	< 0.001	1.42 (large)
Active Engagement in Religious Practices	62.1 $\pm$ 16.7 %	87.3 $\pm$ 11.5 %	+25.2 %	< 0.001	1.18 (large)

The 30% increase in children's comprehension of Islamic character values is significant, indicating the success of the program's interactive methodology. This improvement goes beyond rote memorization; the use of experiential learning – such as role-playing scenarios where children practiced being *ṣādiq* (truthful) in a peer context – allowed for deeper cognitive assimilation of abstract values. By making the values tangible and relatable to their daily lives in Japan, the program effectively translated theological concepts into applicable moral frameworks.

Furthermore, the 25% rise in engagement with religious practices (including congregational prayer and Quranic recitation) underscores the program's ability to foster internal motivation. The communal and supportive environment shifted religious practice from a potentially isolated family duty to a shared, enjoyable peer activity. This outcome aligns precisely with Mohammadi et al., (2020), who argue that for Muslim youth in diaspora, Islamic character education delivered through interactive and context-sensitive methods is essential for cultivating moral resilience and strengthening a positive identity. The program successfully instilled the practical tools and the moral motivation needed for sustained religious life in a non-Muslim environment.

### 2. Empowerment of Family Units and Parenting Confidence

The sustainability of religious education in the diaspora rests heavily on the confidence and capability of the parents. The community service program's deliberate focus on parental empowerment was crucial. The parenting seminars addressed complex issues such as managing cultural dissonance – the psychological conflict experienced by children navigating two distinct value systems (home vs. school/society) – and integrating essential Islamic routines into the often rigid and demanding schedule of Japanese daily life.

The program evaluation indicated that 87% of participating parents reported increased confidence in guiding their children's religious development. This dramatic increase can be attributed to several factors:





### 3. Validation: Parents realized they were not alone in their struggles

**Practical Tools:** They were provided with specific communication strategies (spiritual dialogue) and scheduling advice to ensure ṣalāt and Quran recitation remained manageable priorities.

**Expert Guidance:** The seminars offered faith-based solutions tailored to the secular environment.

This finding strongly validates Sadiq's (2021) assertion that culturally responsive religious education is vital, as it empowers families to be effective cultural transmitters capable of maintaining their core values while simultaneously adapting and functioning successfully within the host culture. By equipping the parents, the program ensures the continuation of ICE long after the formal sessions conclude.

### 4. Sociological Impact: Community Cohesion and Network Formation

Perhaps the most transformative and long-lasting outcome of the community service program was the organic emergence of a cohesive support network among the participating Muslim families. Through shared worship, collaborative learning projects, and informal gatherings integrated into the schedule, families moved beyond being mere participants to becoming inter-connected members of a supportive community.

The qualitative feedback in the community service report revealed a powerful emotional and psychological impact, with families reporting feeling “less alone” and “more connected” to others who share their unique set of values and cross-cultural challenges. This outcome is a direct testament to the principles articulated by Gibson and Richey (2020) regarding the role of community bonding in safeguarding the psychological well-being of minority groups.

This network formation achieves two critical goals: (1) **Reduced Isolation:** It provides an immediate sense of belonging and mutual understanding, counteracting the isolation often felt in highly homogenous societies. (2) **Resource Sharing:** The network facilitates the informal exchange of vital, context-specific knowledge—from identifying halal food sources to navigating Japanese school procedures while respecting religious requirements.

This newly formed social capital is a sustainable asset that ensures the long-term resilience and well-being of the Muslim diaspora in the region.

### 5. Intercultural Dialogue and Institutional Collaboration

The strategic involvement of Tokyo Camii and other Japanese institutions elevated the program beyond internal religious instruction; it positioned the initiative as a platform for intercultural dialogue and integration. Activities such as open mosque days and collaborative cultural events served to: (1) **Promote Mutual Respect:** They demystified Islam for the broader Japanese community, countering negative stereotypes and fostering genuine understanding. (2) **Normalize Identity:** For the children, seeing their religious space and activities openly recognized by Japanese institutions normalized their identity, reinforcing their sense of belonging in Japan.

This dynamic aligns with De Vries et al., (2021), who argue that successful community service programs must foster intercultural dialogue to contribute to truly inclusive educational ecosystems. The community service initiative demonstrated how religious



education, when facilitated with an open and collaborative spirit, can successfully serve as a bridge for cultural integration rather than an isolating barrier, enriching both the minority and majority communities.

#### 6. Operational Challenges, Adaptive Strategies, and Future Direction

Despite the program's overall success, its implementation revealed several predictable, yet complex, operational challenges inherent to delivering services in a multi-lingual, high-demand, diaspora context. The ability to adapt to these obstacles provides valuable insights for future program development.

#### 7. Analysis of Challenges

**Language Barriers:** This was a multi-faceted challenge. While the parents were typically proficient in Bahasa Indonesia or English, many younger, Japanese-born children were far more dominant in Japanese. Furthermore, Japanese-born mothers who had converted or married into the community often struggled with the terminology used in non-Japanese religious instruction, leading to gaps in their ability to reinforce lessons at home.

**Scheduling Conflicts:** Japan's intense work culture led to significant challenges in scheduling, as many parents could not consistently commit to weekend sessions. Children's rigid public school and juku (cram school) schedules further complicated continuous attendance, threatening the efficacy of sequential lesson delivery.

**Limited Access to Resources:** High-quality, culturally-adapted Islamic educational materials, especially those that are bilingual (Japanese/other language), are scarce and expensive. This resource limitation was exacerbated outside the major urban hubs like Tokyo and Osaka, preventing easy program scalability.

#### 8. Adaptive Strategies and Lessons Learned

These challenges necessitated immediate, adaptive strategies, echoing Bringle and Clayton's (2012) framework for civic engagement which emphasizes flexibility and responsiveness in program design.

**Bilingualization and Contextualization:** To address language barriers, all core material summaries and vocabulary lists were developed bilingually (Japanese and the family's primary language). Instructors utilized more visual aids and simple Japanese phrases to bridge the linguistic gap for the children.

**Asynchronous Digital Content:** To overcome scheduling conflicts, the team leveraged digital platforms. Key seminar recordings and weekly practical assignments (e.g., wudu' practice videos, ṣalāt step-by-step guides) were uploaded as asynchronous digital content. This allowed busy parents to access the lessons during off-hours and for children to review material at their own pace, significantly improving continuity of learning.

**Localization and Hub Development:** To prepare for future expansion, the program began establishing localized support groups led by trained parent volunteers outside the main Tokyo Camii hub. This decentralized model is crucial for reaching families in smaller cities, mitigating the distance and travel time issues.

### D. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the international community service program in Japan successfully demonstrated that a community-driven, culturally responsive initiative can



generate profound educational and social impact for minority religious groups. By achieving a 30% increase in character comprehension and establishing a resilient support network, the program not only strengthened the individual religious identity of the children but also enhanced the collective psychological well-being of Muslim families navigating life in Japan.

This achievement contributes significantly to the broader discourse on multicultural education, validating Banks (2016) assertion that promoting understanding and respect among diverse cultural groups is essential in a globalized world. The program proved that religious education can be a force for integration, provided it is delivered in partnership with the host community and adapted to local needs.

To translate this successful pilot into a scalable, national model, the following recommendations are crucial and align with the advocacy for religious organizations to lead community development (Al-Mashat & Yaseen, 2020): (1) Expand Digital Platform Integration: Develop a dedicated, professional digital platform or application that serves as the central repository for all educational resources, peer-mentoring features, and asynchronous video lessons. This is essential for reaching families outside the major urban centers. (2) Systematic Development of Bilingual Content: Invest in the systematic creation of high-quality, high-context bilingual (Japanese-primary language) educational materials for children and parents, focusing on vocabulary, storybooks, and interactive activities that bridge Japanese culture with Islamic values. (3) Establish Localized Hubs and Peer Mentoring: Formalize the localized support groups into official satellite “Family Support Hubs.” Implement a structured peer-mentoring program where experienced parents (those reporting high confidence, like the 87% found in this study) receive training to guide new families, ensuring a decentralized, self-sustaining community infrastructure. (4) Strengthen Collaboration with Japanese Educational Institutions: Actively seek collaboration with local Japanese schools, community centers, and universities to conduct workshops on cultural literacy and religious diversity. This proactive engagement promotes inclusivity at the institutional level and further normalizes the identity of Muslim children in the public sphere.

By adopting these strategies, the model developed by the community service in Japan can evolve into a robust, sustainable blueprint for empowering Muslim diaspora communities to preserve their faith and flourish in any non-majority context.

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## **F.AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Both authors contributed equally and collaboratively to all stages of the project – from proposal preparation and field implementation to the writing and completion of this scientific article.





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